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Subject-Object Relations: the Romantic Version of an Epistemological Problem and Its Transformation in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas (Volumes I and II).

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SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONS: THE ROMANTIC VERSION OF AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND ITS TRANSFORMATION IN THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following works are commonly cited in the text. Their abbreviations and the appropriate page numbers appear in parentheses in the text following the material directly or indirectly cited.

Works by Dylan Thomas:

AST	Adventures in the Skin Trade (1955)
BL	British Library MSS.
Canary	The Death of the King's Canary (John Davenport, co-author, 1976)
CP	Collected Poems: 1934-1952 (rev. ed. 1956)
D&D	The Doctor and the Devils and Other Scripts (1966)
DTS	Dylan Thomas Summer School (University College of Swansea, 20-27th July 1974). Ten lectures (individually cited in the text)
EPW	Dylan Thomas: Early Prose Writings (1971)
LVW	Letters to Vernon Watkins (1957)
N	Poet in the Making: The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas (1967)
P	The Poems of Dylan Thomas (1971)
PA	Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog (1940)
PS	A Prospect of the Sea (1955)
QEOM	Quite Early One Morning (British edition, 1954)
QEOM/US	Quite Early One Morning (U. S. edition, 1954)
SL	Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas (1966)
Texas	Texas Manuscript Library MSS.
TML	Twelve More Letters (1969)
TYA	Twenty Years A-Growing (1964)
UMW	Under Milk Wood (1954)

Major Biographical Sources:

Ferris	Dylan Thomas (1977) by Paul Ferris
DTA	Dylan Thomas in America (1955) by John Malcolm Brinnin
Leftover	Leftover Life to Kill (1957) by Caitlin Thomas
Life	The Life of Dylan Thomas (1965) by Constantine FitzGibbon
MFDT	My Friend Dylan Thomas (1977) by Daniel Jones

Bibliographies of the Works by and about Dylan Thomas:

Rolph DT	Dylan Thomas: A Bibliography by J. Alexander Rolph (1956)
Maud DTP	Dylan Thomas in Print: A Bibliographical History by Ralph Maud (1970)

Handbooks of Explication:

SP	Dylan Thomas: Selected Poems, ed. by Walford Davies with "Notes" (1974)
WDT	The World of Dylan Thomas by Clark Emery (1962)
RG	A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas by William York Tindall (1962)

Mr. Woods has much to offer . . . he has a vocabulary steeped in classical tradition, and an ear for the secret magic of words. He is a scholar, which accounts for much; he is an accomplished metrician. But these are not the things that will take him to heaven; skill and learning will not link him hand in hand with Shelley, Blake and Keats, stepping shadowy from dark to light; rather will they leave him in the dark, tied back to back with Matthew Arnold, and the dark figures of the early twentieth century poets.

Dylan Thomas "The Poets of Swansea" (1932)

My poetry is, or should be, useful to me for one reason: it is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light . . .

Dylan Thomas "Answers To An Enquiry" (1934)

I am in the path of Blake, but so far behind him that only the wings of his heels are in sight.

Dylan Thomas "Letter to Pamela Johnson" (1933)

Perhaps the greatest works of art are those that reconcile, perfectly, inner and outer.

Dylan Thomas "Letter to Trevor Hughes" (1933)

DYLAN THOMAS

(November 1953)

In November of Catherine Wheels and rockets
This roaring ranter, man and boy,
Proved Guy Fawkes true, and burned on a real fire.
His rhymes that stuffed his body were the straw,
His poems he shed out of his pockets,
Were squibs and sweets and string and wire,
The crackling gorse thorn crowned him with spiked joy.

Where he sang, burning, round his neck a cup
Begged: 'Pennies, pennies, for the Guy!'
And every coin from every passer by
When it was melted, he drank fiery up.
And all his sins, before his voice that spoke,
Shot angels skywards. Now, that he should die
Proves the fire was the centre of his joke.

Stephen Spender (Collected Poems, p. 198)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is the investigation of the reasons that have led critics to designate Dylan Thomas as a "Romantic" poet. The critical reception of Thomas's poetry in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s is epitomized in Stephen Spender's changing attitudes toward Thomas's successive volumes of poetry: amazement at the brilliant and evocative imagery, concern that such poetry might be too surrealistic and not political enough, and finally an understanding and acceptance of the poetry as that of "A Romantic in Revolt," to quote from Spender's 1952 review of Collected Poems. Appropriated by the surrealists in the 1930s and the Romantic movements of the 1940s (the Apocalypse) or the 1950s (the New Romantics), Thomas was equally condemned by the Leftist readers in the 1930s and the anti-Romantic poets of the Movement in the 1950s. Interestingly, both in praise and condemnation, readers compared Thomas to earlier Romantic poets, especially Whitman, Blake, and Wordsworth.

Even though invoked very often in the reviews of Thomas's separate volumes, the term "Romantic" is the most notoriously difficult term to define in literary criticism. The modern debate over the definition of "Romantic" intensified with the pronouncement by A. O. Lovejoy that the term could not be defined. What is the differentiating characteristic of Romanticism? As formulated most clearly and succinctly by Earl Wasserman and portrayed in mythic terms by Northrop Frye, the differentiating characteristic of Romanticism is not a positive set of traits but a commonly faced "problem": that problem is the one of subject-

object relations, the nature of the relationship between the perceiving self and the perceived outer world. From this central problem flow many of the secondary traits "symptomatic" of that problem: the centrality of the self, the importance of nature to the self (especially a particularized landscape), the figure of the child as a symbol of unity of being, the poet as his own Christ-like redeemer, various poetic forms and devices, and the related powers of imagination and love that overcome both the division between the self and the world and the discord among the faculties of the mind.

With this tentative designation of the differentiating characteristic of Romanticism as well as various secondary traits, one can turn to the question of the relation of Romanticism to Modernism. In recent years, critics such as Yvor Winters, Harold Bloom, George Bornstein, Robert Langbaum, and others have refuted the claims of the early Modernist poets that theirs was an anti-Romantic revolution. In fact, the Modernist poet shares the central Romantic "negative," the problem of the relation of self and world. What, if anything, separates the Modernist poet from earlier Romantics is his greater despair in Romantic "positives," such as faith in the healing powers of imagination and love. In this context, when looking at Thomas's statements on the nature of poetry, one finds that he identifies the central concern of poetry as that of overcoming the division between "inner" and "outer" worlds. This concern leads him to try to find a way to overcome the burdens of self-consciousness in a loving, imaginative union with nature in nature's unfallen visionary form.

Thomas's own poetry falls into three essential phases: (1) the

juvenilia, the Notebooks (1930-34), and the poems of 1934-36; (2) the poems dealing with poetics, marriage, war, love, and childhood in nature (1936-45); and (3) the poems of 1946-53. In the first phase, Thomas works through various Romantic postures to adopt a "poetic self" that is a redeemer figure, a figure most fully realized in a difficult sonnet sequence Altarwise by Owl-light (1935-36). In the second phase, the realities of marriage and war are transformed by the imagination with the development of a sacramental view of nature and a shift in the poet's stance within the poem from that of an assertive, all-powerful redeemer of the self and nature to that of priest-like intermediary between the reader or figures in the poems and the divine power that permeates the landscape. Finally, in the third phase, one finds poems that may be divided into those that struggle to create a new cosmology in which the adult poet's exercise of imaginative power can lead him to a vision of "Country Heaven" or nature in its Edenic form and those that contain a darker, more desperate assertion by the self of its own identity in the face of impending death. In the unfinished In Country Heaven and the last finished poem, "Author's Prologue," Thomas overcomes the darker strain in the later poems in a full and final assertion of faith in the power of imagination and of love in linking the poet to a sacramental landscape and in overcoming thereby the central Romantic problem of the relation of the self and the world.

INTRODUCTION

This study of Dylan Thomas's poetry began with the discovery that one of the central concerns of that poet was similar to that which has come to be seen as one of the most promising candidates for the distinguishing characteristic of English Romanticism. This concern may be called the problem of subject-object relations and the importance of imagination in resolving the problem. What I intend to show is that the problem of subject-object relations as manifested in the High Romantic period occurs in its essential form in Dylan Thomas's poetry as well as in his prose statements about poetry and poetics. The example of Thomas, in turn, should provide additional support for the argument of a number of recent critics that Modernism, far from being anti-Romantic, is significantly informed by Romantic ideas. In fact, as some critics argue, Modernism may best be seen as a late phase of a single movement of which High Romanticism was the first observably crucial stage. If this argument is valid, then it should be of no surprise to find the problem of subject-object relations, as understood by critics of the High Romantic period, an essential part of Dylan Thomas's poetic concerns.

Chapter I is a survey of the critical reception of the separate volumes of Dylan Thomas's poetry that appeared in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In addition, the dominant poetic character of these decades of British poetry is discussed. The increasing inclination of reviewers to label Thomas as "Romantic" and to compare his poetry to that of the High Romantics, especially the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth, is documented

in order to justify the present effort to discover a valid definition of "Romantic" that illuminates Thomas's inheritance from the poets of the High Romantic period. Chapter II is a survey of diverse critical views concerning the usefulness, exactness, and applicability of "Romantic" and its equivalent or associated terms. This chapter comprises three major parts. The first part is a brief summary of the history of the term "Romantic." The second part is a survey of two major groupings of critics seeking to define Romanticism: (1) those who attempt to define by identifying a single trait or cluster of traits said to be commonly held among Romantic poets and (2) those who attempt to define by identifying a problem commonly held among Romantic poets (though diverse solutions for the problem may be offered). The third part of Chapter II is a consideration of Romantic traits commonly ascribed to Romantic poets which may be symptomatic of the presence of the problem of subject-object relations and which also appear in the poetry of Dylan Thomas. Chapter III is a survey of the critical debate over the extent of the debt of Modernism to High Romanticism. This chapter concludes with an analysis of Dylan Thomas's statements on poetry and poetics in light of his inheritance from Romantic tradition, especially his inheritance of the problem of subject-object relations and the role of imagination in resolving the problem. Attention is also paid to other Romantic traits.

Chapter IV is an analysis of representative poems from The Notebooks (1930-34), 18 Poems (1934), and Twenty-Five Poems (1936). Chapter V analyzes poems from The Map of Love (1939) and Deaths and Entrances (1946). Chapter VI discusses poems from In Country Sleep and Other Poems (1952) as well as "Author's Prologue" to Collected Poems: 1934-

1952, and two unfinished poems. Chapters IV, V, and VI are an effort to document the claim that the problem of subject-object relations and its symptoms, as inherited from the High Romantics, significantly inform Dylan Thomas's poetry.

CHAPTER I

"A ROMANTIC IN REVOLT": THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

In early December of 1952, Dylan Thomas wrote a short letter to fellow poet Stephen Spender. The letter was addressed from the Boat-house, Thomas's cliffside workroom in the Welsh seacoast village of Laugharne, his home since 1949. Thomas's Collected Poems: 1934-1952 had just been published the previous month (November 10), and Spender had written a moderately long review for The Spectator (December 5, 1952). This was not the first review of Thomas that Spender had written, for he had previously published short pieces on Twenty-Five Poems (1936) and Deaths and Entrances (1946).[1] In fact, when Thomas was still a relatively unknown provincial poet of twenty living in his home town of Swansea, Spender had written a letter of inquiry concerning Thomas to the BBC's weekly journal, The Listener, that had just published one of Thomas's most striking early poems, "Light breaks where no sun shines," in its issue for March 14, 1934.[2] Subsequently, Spender wrote to the young Thomas in Swansea, and Thomas's understandably ebullient reply survives (SL 94-5). However, Spender's first, favorable reaction to the Listener poem did not extend to all of Thomas's early work. In a famous review of Thomas's second volume, Twenty-Five Poems, in the London Marxist paper the Daily Worker for December 2, 1936, Spender, in these years close to being a doctrinaire Leftist, accused Thomas of the sin of surrealism: "The truth is that Thomas's poetry is turned on like a tap;

it is just poetic stuff with no beginning nor end, or intelligent and intelligible control."[3] Although he did not reply directly to Spender's charge, Thomas did quote Spender's remarks in a letter to Henry Treece, one of the founders of the Apocalypse group of poets, who was then working on what would become the first book-length study of Thomas's poems, Dylan Thomas (1949). In the letter Thomas, after revealing that he has carefully read various reviews of his new book, urges Treece to refute Spender's accusation in Treece's own forthcoming book: "I know that you wouldn't want to introduce into your book any particular bickering, but Spender's remark is really the opposite of what is true. My poems are formed; they are not turned on like a tap at all; they are 'watertight compartments'. Much of the obscurity is due to rigorous compression; the last thing they do is to flow; they are much rather hewn" (SL 196). Leaving aside for the moment the apparent contradiction between Thomas's remarks in this letter and his reply ("It just flows") to a question about how he wrote poems contemporaneous with those deplored by Spender, it is nevertheless accurate to say that Thomas read reviews of his books both sensitively and carefully.[4] Even so, the letter which Thomas wrote to Spender upon the occasion of Spender's 1952 review of Collected Poems is the only letter published so far that Thomas wrote directly to a reviewer in order to comment at length on that person's review of one of his books of poems.

Both Spender's 1952 review and Thomas's letter differ in tone and appraisal from each poet's earlier evaluation of the other. Since his disparaging remark in the Daily Worker about the "water tap" quality of Thomas's poems, Spender had undergone a change of heart, brought about in large measure by his emergence from the overtly Leftist political

orientation of the poets associated with W. H. Auden. For instance, in review of Thomas's postwar volume Deaths and Entrances (1946), Spender claimed that "the hypothesis of a poem is the emotional experience . . . it is the validity of this moment which the consistency of the poetic logic proves" and that for Thomas, "who writes poetry for poetry's sake," each "vivid impression for which he can find a suitable image is poetry."[5] Also, in a survey of postwar poetry published in the same year, Spender labeled the reaction against Auden and his followers by the younger poets of the late thirties and the forties as a movement toward "the involuntary, the mysterious, the word-intoxicated, the romantic and the Celtic." Furthermore, says Spender, "of these younger writers, Dylan Thomas is a poet of whom, at times, we can use the word 'genius.'"[6] Finally, in a eulogy published in Britain Today two months after Thomas's death in November, 1953, Spender comes full circle from the reviewer who eighteen years earlier criticized a "surrealist" Thomas in the Daily Worker: "Dylan Thomas's poetry was a criticism of the assumption of Marxist critics . . . that a poem is ultimately reducible to terms of social ideas which the poet, out of his position in society, states. It was likewise a criticism of the belief of other critics . . . that a poem can be analysed as a complex of literary and intellectual influences. Dylan Thomas maintains in his own poetry another attitude; that poetry is, like life itself, a unity in which mind and flesh, spirit and body, intellect and sensuality, are inseparably and indissolubly one. The attempt to dissect it into simply intellectual or ideological elements kills the object of dissection."[7] We murder to dissect. Although a strict appraisal of Spender's remarks might find them impressionistic, and although Spender makes Thomas out to be more of an aesthetic than Thomas's statements on

poetry and his poems themselves show him to be, still Spender's emphasis on the non-paraphrasable, spontaneity in methods of composition, the capturing of the epiphanic moment of insight in the image, and most importantly, his characterization of the chief aim of Thomas's poems as the unification of various dualisms under the pressure of imagination is correct. Spender's only fault is to leave the impression that the coalescence of these opposites into unity is a consistently achieved effect and thus to omit from his list of resolutions the one which governs the others: a determination of the nature of the relationship between the subject (the self) and the object (the external world) and the role of imagination in attempting to govern the relationship on its own terms. Nevertheless, Spender is on the right track.[8] Spender's various responses exemplify a growing tendency to see and praise Thomas as a poet in the Romantic tradition, a tendency epitomized in Spender's Spectator review of Collected Poems (1952). A closer look at this review that drew praise from Thomas himself is an important preface to a survey of the critical reception of Thomas's poetry from 1934 to 1952.

The fact that Thomas's letter to Spender concerning the review is the only one that he is thought to have written directly to a person to comment at length on a review of one of his own books of poems lends some significance both to Thomas's comments and Spender's review. To Spender Thomas says that he is writing

> only to thank you, very much indeed, for your notice, of my Collected Poems, in the Spectator. You were, as you know, the very first person ever to write to me about a poem of mine; and this is now the clearest, most considered and sympathetic, and, in my opinion, truest, review that I have ever seen of my writing. I mean, that your statement of understanding of my aim and method seems to me to be altogether true; and no critic has attempted, in writing about my most uneven and unsatisfactory work, to set out, plainly,

> the difference between the writing of poetry from words and the writing of poetry towards words -- though that's, of course, oversimplification. No writer before you; and I do want, please, to thank you again very much.
>
> (SL 386)

Stephen Spender's review was entitled "A Romantic in Revolt."

Throughout Spender's review of Collected Poems his argument for the nature and development of Thomas's poetry places its greatest burden on the role of imagination in forging unity out of multiplicity, a task which many contemporary critics of Romanticism and Modernism call the problem of subject-object relations. The Romantic form of this problem is characterized by the burden placed on the poet alone -- divorced from a received cosmology and epistemology as well as from their interpreters the theologian and philosopher -- and on the faculty of imagination as the single agent capable of resolving the subject-object dilemma.[9] As many of the secondary characteristics of Romanticism are symptomatic of its central problem, it is not surprising to find Spender identifying them in Thomas. Contrasting Thomas to what he sees as Eliot and Auden's "classicism" (an emphasis on reason, the priority of the paraphrasable content of the poem, and a theoretical orientation toward pragmatism), Spender cites Thomas's belief in the authority of imagination ("poetry as a self-sufficient kingdom of poetic ideas"), the priority of the non-rational ("his poems contain the minimum material which can be translated into prose"), the concrete ("that sensuous word-choosing faculty of his imagination . . . /that creates/ a chain of images"), and a theoretical orientation toward expressivism ("a powerful emotion . . . suggests to Dylan Thomas an image or succession of images, and it is these which he puts down").[10] And, an as important element of High Romantic poetry was its transformation of political revolutionism into poetic terms (apocalypse

of imagination), so Spender finds Thomas "a romantic revolting against a thin contemporary classical tendency."[11] Thomas's opposition to "the theological views of Eliot and Auden" and his strengthening isolation from a Welsh provincial background in opposition to "Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard intellectualism" and "the King's English of London and the South" place the central burden on the poet-as-poet and on the faculty of imagination in defining and determining the relation between self and world.[12]

The imagination's most difficult task is to bridge the gap between language and the world so that, as Spender, invoking the name and views of Keats, says, "words become sensations and sensations words"; in fact, Thomas seeks to go even further and attempts not only to realize words in the world of the poem but in the world itself -- to become a literalist of the imagination. In some poems, Thomas wants to go even beyond the Coleridgean Secondary Imagination to usurp the place of God and the authority of the Primary Imagination (where Word and things are co-terminous and one). This desire for the unity of word and sensation is accompanied by a similar desire for the unity of image and idea. As Spender explains, Thomas's poetic process originates in emotion whose overflowing yields an image or images: "and it is these he puts down, without bringing forward into consciousness the ideas which are associated with such images." The final phase of the poetic process can be described as dependent on the interaction of self and world at a crucial instant when the poem, "galvanized into unity," emerges "inspired by a unifying vision, moment of self-realisation, great occasion, which organises the images around this centre."

Should this epiphanic moment fail to be seized, the poem "tends to fall apart into its separate compartments." Should the moment foster the

creation of poetry, the result is celebration, wonder, a poem "filled with joy and light."[13] Obviously, such poetry is not ultimately the poetry of aestheticism. As Spender himself says, "Dylan Thomas is frequently described as a 'pure poet,' but he is nothing so sophisticated, literary and (to use the word in a purely aesthetic sense) decadent."[14] Furthermore, imagination became for Thomas a moral power whose ability to foster a healing, redemptive love was released in the act of poetic creation. This belief is the basis for Thomas's remark in his letter to Spender concerning the Spectator review that Spender had accurately stated what Thomas called "my aim and method" based on "the difference between the writing of poetry from words and the writing of poetry towards words" (SL 21). Using Shelley as his example, Thomas first mentioned this from/towards distinction in a 1934 letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson. There, he describes how he became a poet: "It's the word that attracted me. Have I ever told you of the theory of how all writers either work towards or away from words? Even if I have, I'll tell it to you again because it's true. Any poet or novelist . . . either works out of words or in the direction of them. The realistic novelist -- Bennett for instance -- sees things, hears things, imagines things . . . & then goes towards words as the most suitable medium through which to express these experiences. A romanticist like Shelley, on the other hand, is his medium first, & expresses out of his medium what he sees, hears, thinks, & imagines" (SL 115).

And it is the supposed method of Shelley that Thomas adopted as his own. Comparing this passage to Spender's analysis, it is easy to see why Thomas was pleased with the Spectator review of his Collected Poems. When the poet writes out of words, the power of imagination as a creative

mode of knowledge asserts its priority over that of any other mode. Though not a Christian, Thomas believed in the power of the word not only to imitate but to become the Word. For him, the opening verses of Genesis, taken over from theology into poetics, became a "literal" goal: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (1:3). Ideally, the poet would assume the role of God the Creator, imagination's words would become God's creating Word, and the exercise of imaginative power would flow from two propositions in Shelley's Defence of Poetry: "the great secret of morals is love . . . the great instrument of moral good is the imagination."[15] Dylan Thomas's poetry may be read as an ongoing struggle to realize these rather astounding goals. What Thomas describes as an ideal in his 1934 letter to Miss Johnson, Spender describes in 1952 as an achieved result. Whether as a poet Thomas was able to resolve the problem of subject-object relations remains, however, a question to be answered. Certainly he came in time to see his poetry as a means by which love might be sent out into the world as a redemptive power, to flow, as Thomas says, "in war, grief, and the great holes and corners of universal love" until the "love that is evergreen" transforms the "dead and deathless" and "love unbolts the dark" (QEOM 137; P 205, 210).

The critical reception of Dylan Thomas's poetry may be roughly divided into three phases. First, there was a generally polemical reception of the various volumes of poetry from 18 Poems (1934) through Collected Poems (1952). This critical debate occurred almost exclusively in the review columns and editorial pages of the important English and Welsh newspapers and poetry journals of the day. Second, with the exception of Henry Treece's Dylan Thomas (1949), the fifties and sixties saw the appearance of the first book-length critical studies of Thomas's

poems. Most of these studies were general surveys of Thomas's work emphasizing the immediate problem of explicating difficult texts for the general reader. Third, in the middle sixties and early seventies academic studies shifted to an interest in placing Thomas in one of several contexts such as Jungian psychology, Gnosticism, Christianity, Nietzchean Dionysianism, or the Welsh bardic tradition. Each of the studies in the third phase sought to give unity to Thomas's poetry by defining his poetic development in terms of one of these contexts. Of these three phases of critical reception, Thomas himself lived long enough to be aware of one -- reviews -- to which literary form he himself made many contributions. His visits to America, however, brought him into contact with the purely academic critics from whose ranks would pour, after his death, so many studies. Thus, perhaps it is only fair, before beginning a survey of the critical reception of the poetry, to recount Thomas's own attitudes toward literary criticism and its authors.

Thomas's attitudes toward critics and reviewers, who were to damn and praise him so amply, were curiously at odds. Although he avidly read the reviews of his own books, he seemed at other times to consider critics, especially academic ones, as people who attempted to rationalize and to explicate that which was essentially inexplicable -- poetry -- an art which Thomas called "the magic beyond definition" (QEOM 169). In a 1933 letter to Trevor Hughes, a Swansea friend and fellow writer, Thomas castigated the shallow glibness of the professional reviewer: "Oh, to be critic! 'Mr. X shows promise. This week's masterpiece. Mr. Y is bad.' So simple, no bother, no bleeding of writing" (SL 17). Five years later in a review of Beckett's Murphy (1938) Thomas again deplored facile reviewing, calling it "the cash-register system that deals in the currency

of petty facts and penny praises" (EPW 186). Both petty facts and penny praises followed Thomas in his encounters with academic critics and their students during his four visits to America (1950-53). In Dylan Thomas in America, John Malcolm Brinnin has recounted the story of a dinner party at Yale which symbolizes Thomas's uneasy relations with the academy:

> . . . this occasion at Yale -- his introduction to academic life in America -- was so grim and stultifying as to become the standard against which he would measure every awkward and unhappy event. . . . all the professors sat around in a brooding druidic circle apparently awaiting an oracle . . . an uneasy sense of waiting, a feeling that nothing was happening, turned the meal into a ritual of politeness in which the passing of a plate of celery was an event of magnitude.
>
> (DTA 46-7)

Conversely, from the perspective of the American audience, the lecturing poet-as-critic seemed an oddity. Thus, in "A Visit to America," a humorous piece recorded for the BBC, Thomas described the mindless adulation of uncritical audiences. As a counterpoint to what he perceived as stuffiness at Yale, he saw that European lecturers in America "begin to mistrust themselves, and their reputations -- for they have found, too often, that an audience will receive a lantern-lecture on, say, ceramics, with the same uninhibited enthusiasm that it accorded the very week before to a paper on the Modern Turkish novel" (QEOM 63). Such lecturers include "men from the B.B.C. who /like Thomas himself/ speak as though they had the Elgin Marbles in their mouths, and thus "develop elephantiasis of the reputation (huge trunks and teeny minds)" (QEOM 68). The lecturer or poet also faces the irritating task of "stammering inconsequential answers in an over-British accent to /an audience's/ genial questions about what international conference Stephen Spender might be attending at the moment or the reactions of British poets to the

work of a famous American whose name he did not know or catch" (QEOM 68). Thomas wrote thus from personal experience of well over a hundred poetry readings in America from 1950 to 1953. In a prose introduction to these readings, recorded during the March 7, 1952 reading at M.I.T., Thomas shows his unease with criticism by pleading with the audience:

> You won't ask me any questions afterward, will you? I don't mind answering a bit, only I can't. Even to such simple questions as, "What is the relationship of the poet to society in a hydrogenous age?" I can only cough and stammer. And some of the questions I remember from the nightmare past -- "Tell me, are the young English intellectuals really psychological?" "Is it absolutely essential, do you think, to be homosexual to write love poems to women?" "I always carry Kierkegaard in my pocket. What do you carry?"[16]

Even among a smaller group of students such as those at a conference at the University of Utah, Thomas sidestepped critical queries with short, ironic replies. In answer to a question as to whether he paid any attention to the critics, he replied at some length:

> ANOTHER STUDENT: Do you pay any attention to critics -- for instance?
>
> THOMAS: Yes. Sometimes I wake up in the night and wonder about them. I don't know what they have against me. As far as _____ goes, it is a personal matter, I'm sure. He just can't abide me. He can't stand to read me at all. I don't know why. I pay attention to the praise too -- it's easier to take, although it isn't any truer and I don't believe it any more than the other. I mean, I can't be bought with a few sentences. I don't think they will change me. I know what kind of man I am. (Quietly.) Thirty-seven years with the same head . . .[17]

In an earlier version of the prose introduction recorded at M.I.T., Thomas denies to himself as oral interpreter what he asked of others concerning critical inquiries about his poems:

> I do not remember -- that is the point -- the first impulse that pumped and shoved most of the earlier poems along, and they are still too near to me, with

> their vehement beat-pounding black and green rhythms . . . for me to see the written evidence of it. My interpretation of them . . . could only be a parroting of the say I once had.
>
> (QEOM 130)

In any case, formalist analyses of poetic structure seemed to Thomas to omit the essence of poetry: "You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick, and say to yourself when the works are laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes and rhythms, Yes, this is it, this is why the poem moves me so. It is because of the craftsmanship. But you're back again where you began."[18] Criticism, for Thomas, can never capture "the magic beyond definition . . . those moments of magical accident" (QEOM 169).

Critics, of course, have not balked at Thomas's defensive invocation of the mystery at the source of poetry. The earliest critics of the poetry, reviewers of the separate volumes of verse, did however tend to fall rather simply into categories distinguished by Thomas himself in a letter to Vernon Watkins: "I suppose, argumentative, not randomly speaking, that all criticism which is not an analysis of reasons for praise must primarily be suspicion; and that's stimulating" (LVW 67). Indeed, each of Thomas's volumes published between 1934 and 1952 received ample praise and blame.

Thomas's first book, 18 Poems (1934), appeared in a poetic decade usually characterized as one in which the poet's political responsibility and awareness were paramount in influencing the kind of poetry he wrote. Thus, in 1933, the year before 18 Poems, Hugh Porteus announced that "verse will be worn longer this year, and rather Red."[19] In the wake of the Great War, the General Strike of 1926, and the worldwide depression which had become severe in Britain by 1931, poets such as MacNeice,

Spender, Auden, and Day Lewis (dubbed "Macspaunday" for their shared political concerns) turned, in their verse, towards Marxism as a possible cure for the ills of the West. In the early thirties, before Hitler assumed power, Auden even said once that should Marxism fail even fascism might be tried.[20] Politically aware poets were divided into those who were pacifists, not wishing to repeat the horrors of the Great War which had left a nightmare impression on them as children, and those who were committed to the Left, their intensity of commitment paralleling Hitler's rearming of fascist Germany and his early annexations of the Rhineland and Austria. The commitment of these poets reached a crisis during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. To poets such as Auden or Spender, both of whom made pilgrimages to Spain in non-combatant roles, the Civil War was a living image of their political concerns. Auden's poem "Spain 1937" is a good example of the typical attitude of the Leftist poet in the thirties. However, the loss of Spain to fascism and the realization that the war had been viewed by the Germans as a mere training ground for the world war to come caused many poets to become disillusioned with the possibility of political revolution. The Moscow Trials (1936-38) and the Soviet-German nonaggression pact (1939) made the Marxist solution less appealing. Later, Auden, gone to America in 1939, returned to Anglicanism, and Spender recanted his earlier Marxist position.[21] Spender, in a retrospective essay on the poetry produced during the war, concluded that no great poems had been inspired by the politics of the war.[22]

However, the thirties were not as homogeneous as might first be thought. In the 1952 Spectator review, Spender himself looked back on Dylan Thomas as having purposefully rebelled against the conscious

intellectualism, wit, and political emphasis of "Macspaunday." Thomas himself, in a special Auden double number of New Verse (November, 1937), published for Auden's thirtieth birthday, makes his own rebellious relationship clear:

> I sometimes think of Mr. Auden's poetry as a hygiene, a knowledge and practice, based on a brilliantly prejudiced analysis of contemporary disorders, relating to the preservation and promotion of health, a sanitary science and a flusher of melancholies. I sometimes think of his poetry as a great war, admire intensely the mature, religious, and logical fighter, and deprecate the boy bushranger.
> . . .
> P.S. -- Congratulations on Auden's seventieth birthday.[23]

Significantly, Thomas's staunchest early admirer among reviewers was the poet Edith Sitwell. Miss Sitwell, viciously satirized in the Leftist poetry journals of the thirties as a Romantic (especially by Geoffrey Grigson in New Verse), displayed a personalism, mysticism, and organicism in her verse while her reviews were effusively impressionistic. The earliest of her reviews of Thomas, that of 18 Poems in The London Mercury (February, 1936) was instrumental in bringing a wider audience to Thomas's poetry: "Mr. Thomas . . . has very great gifts, though they are not as yet completely resolved. He is, at moments, prey to his subconscious self, and consequently to obscurity; but from that subconscious self rise, time after time, lines which are transmuted by his conscious self into really great poetry . . . Here . . . is a young man who has every likelihood of becoming a great poet, if only he will work hard enough at subduing his obscurity: I know of no young poet of our time whose poetic gifts are on such great lines."[24] Twenty years later, Miss Sitwell's views remained unchanged: "I do not remember exactly on what day he came to see me first. It seems to me now . . . that he and his poetry were always a part of my life . . .He had full eyes -- like those of Blake -- giving, at

first, the impression of being unseeing, but seeing all, looking over immeasurable distances."[25] In addition to Miss Sitwell, the arrival of surrealism in Britain around 1935 provided readers with a second, but more problematic Romantic point of reference for Thomas's poetry. Growing out of dadaism, itself a protest movement during and after World War I which stressed a conscious irrationalism and destructiveness as a mimetic rebellion against war, surrealism developed in France under the tutelage of Andre Breton. Stressing the importance of dreams, total imaginative freedom, and a direct tapping of the unconscious mind, surrealism made a short-lived impression as an actual movement beginning with A Short Survey of Surrealism (1935) by David Gascoyne. Thomas himself attended the famous 1936 Surrealist Exhibition in the Burlington Galleries, London, where he wandered through the crowd carrying a tea cup full of boiled string and asking "weak or strong?" At a poetry reading which featured French surrealist Paul Eluard, Thomas also read -- a postcard (Life 216).

The poetry of the Left and the poetry of surrealism provide two extremes against which the comments of reviewers of Thomas's poetry in the thirties may be measured. The unflappable TLS reviewers of the volumes which appeared in the thirties found the poems powerful but obscure. Thomas's "idiom" in 18 Poems is "entirely his own" yet "too 'private' to be easily intelligible."[26] Two years later, TLS found the same idiom in Twenty-Five Poems but described it as intentional, the reader being asked to "hold reason in abeyance" in order to experience "this surrender to a new mode of consciousness."[27] By 1939, TLS though still lamenting a "vision . . . excessively subjective," recognized the controlling force of the poems as Romantic: "a naked imagination which refuses to temper its power by accepting the assistance of less exalted

faculties."[28] A similarly mixed review of Thomas's poems, stressing both their originality and obscurity, appeared in Eliot's Criterion.[29] Eliot himself, in his single recorded comment on Dylan Thomas, expressed the view that Thomas's methods of composition were not controlled by reason: "Dylan Thomas's work was always hit or miss. It was a peculiarity of his type of genius that he either wrote a great poem or something approaching nonsense and one ought to have accepted the inferior with the first-rate. I certainly regarded him always as a poet of considerable importance" (Life 105). Less divided than Eliot, Sir Herbert Read was, along with Edith Sitwell, one of Thomas's most influential early supporters. However, as with Miss Sitwell, sometimes Read did Thomas more harm than good by careless assertions. Probably the most famous example is contained in Read's review of The Map of Love (1939): "These poems cannot be reviewed; they can only be acclaimed."[30] This unhelpful statement is matched at the end of Thomas's career by Philip Toynbee's unqualified claim in 1952 that "Thomas is the greatest living poet in the English language."[31] Of the earlier remark by Read, John Wain, an evenhanded admirer of Thomas, claimed years later that "Mr. Read's famous /statement/ drew such furious abuse and raillery that nowadays no one dare be so outspoken, even if they feel really impelled to praise Thomas."[32]

The furious abuse of which Wain spoke hardly waited for Read's remark. The two greatest sources of attacks on Thomas in the thirties were writers whose political concerns made it hard for them to accept Thomas's overtly nonpolitical subjectivism and those critics associated with F. R. Leavis's Scrutiny (1932-53). In a review of Twenty-Five Poems entitled "Mr. Thomas and Mr. Auden," Michael Cullis saw Thomas as a

belated Aesthetic ("one is never sure if his words intend so full a meaning as it is possible to attach to them") and compared the younger poet unfavorably with Auden: "Dylan is by far the greater 'reactionary' of the two when it comes to giving a creative lead to poetry at this date."[33] Thomas himself in a 1934 review accepts the division of the thirties into the poetry of politics and the poetry of the self: "Between the poetry of private subtlety and the poetry of public vitality, the devil, if you will, of escapism and the deep sea of communal contact, too many poets of this day fall into a miniature gehenna of words where even the flames that blister them are contradictory" (EPS 168). It is in this spirit that one finds opposite to Sitwell and Read the critique of Michael Roberts, prominent Leftist intellectual, poet, and publisher of New Signatures (1932) and New Country (1933) -- volumes which introduced Auden to a wider audience. Of Twenty-Five Poems, Roberts wrote that Thomas is neither "prophetic" nor "intellectual," that a "developing argument" is discarded for "purely verbal associations" in the poems.[34] Critics of a similar persuasion felt it sufficient to label Thomas a surrealist. Thus, Gilbert Armitage found Twenty-Five Poems "obscure with surrealist affinities" and A. T. G. Edwards regretted that "in Mr. Thomas native genius is being increasingly thwarted by a mistaken devotion to the doctrines of surrealism -- to a fashionable intellectual pose."[35] Geoffrey Grigson, once a defender of Thomas, later denounced him in similar terms: "Mr. Thomas . . . cannot help what bubbles into him and bubbles out; but to invest these black magic bubblings . . . with greatness . . . seems a little out of date."[36] The various poison pen writers for Scrutiny had no such occasion to readjust their original estimations of Thomas. Although Thomas was mentioned pejoratively in

their essays, the Scrutineers could not bring themselves to acknowledge Thomas's presence, even as an important bad influence, until Deaths and Entrances appeared in 1946. F. R. Leavis even wrote a "refusal to review" review of Francis Scarfe's Auden and After (1942), a book which praised Thomas.[37] Possibly the best clue to the attitude of Scrutiny toward Thomas throughout its history is the list of subject headings in its final index. There, under "Thomas, Dylan" one finds the following: "bardic element, confusion in his attempts at complexity, cult of Dylan Thomas in 1950's, repudiated by critics of high standards, decorative conceits, failure to mature, incantations, mythology dismissed, religious writing an 'indulgence,' rhetorical exaggeration, rhythmic flaccidity, sexual fantasies," and finally (God preserve us) "Shelleyan qualities."[38]

Aside from these negative critiques, there did exist a range of responses somewhere in between Sitwell and Read's complete acceptance and the hesitant praise of the TLS. These critics accurately registered the rather straightforward excitement that Thomas's early poems caused with their extravagant imagery, emotional impact, and bardic voice. An anonymous review of 18 Poems in The European Quarterly was overwhelmed by "an almost confusing abundance and inventiveness of imagery which seems spontaneously to give concrete and beautiful form to his thoughts: one of the surest signs of true poetic genius."[39] Commenting on Twenty-Five Poems C. Day Lewis admitted an attraction to Thomas's poems almost against his better judgment. His poems are nonsense, Day Lewis says, yet they contain "images of remarkable clarity"; his poems are obscure, yet "a number of these poems do, I feel, present a self-imposed unity beneath the apparently aimless flux of imagery."[40] Another poet whose attraction to Thomas outweighed his fierce commitment to socialism was

Hugh MacDiarmid. Speaking of The Map of Love (1939), MacDiarmid said that "Dylan Thomas is worth a dozen Audens or Spenders or Day Lewises any day."[41] Reviewing the same volume, the poet Edwin Muir made a quieter but more far-reaching claim: "Mr. Thomas's poetry is direct vision; it does not seem to be evolved out of him, but to come to him, sometimes from several sides simultaneously, pell-mell."[42]

Such were the typical reviews of Dylan Thomas's poetry in the thirties. He was condemned for being a surrealist or for not being more politically aware in his verse. He was praised as well, but those who sought to praise him often struggled to find a critical vocabulary capable of defining Thomas's particular sort of poetry. By the forties, Thomas himself was adopted as a model and an ancestor by a new group of British poets -- Apocalypse.

If, as many critics assert, Thomas and Auden "shared" the thirties between them, the forties were Thomas's decade.[43] With Auden in America and with the history of the failure of direct political commitment by poets to change events that led to world war, there was a shift away from poetry on public themes to a more private poetry. This is John Wain's appraisal in his essay "English Poetry: The Immediate Situation" (1957) wherein he concludes that "overnight, the Auden convention was dissolved."[44] In fact, as some poets of the thirties had felt betrayed by Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism, classicism, and royalism, so in the forties some British poets felt betrayed by Auden and Isherwood's move to America. Thus, Cyril Connolly said in 1940: "The flight of Auden and Isherwood to a land richer in incident and opportunity is also a symptom of the failure of social realism as an aesthetic doctrine . . ."[45] By the end of the decade Kenneth Rexroth claimed that "if

Auden dominated the recent past, Dylan Thomas dominates the present."[46]

Two issues of Poetry magazine during the forties reported to American readers the rise of Apocalypse, a loosely defined group of poets who called themselves Romantics and who adopted Dylan Thomas as their most immediate spiritual father. In an essay in the June 1943 issue of Poetry, David Daiches announced to American readers the arrival of Apocalypse. Founded in 1938 by Henry Treece, G. S. Fraser, and J. F. Hendry, the group published two anthologies, The New Apocalypse (1940) and The White Horseman (1941). Thomas never joined the group, saying once that he would never sign any manifesto unless he had written every word of it himself (SL 219). Still, Daiches links Thomas to the Apocalypse because of his extreme subjectivity. Commenting on Thomas's remark that "the more subjective a poem, the clearer the narrative line," Daiches says, "there can be no mistaking the revolutionary nature of that utterance": Hulme's classicism has become "the birth of a new romantic movement."[47] The manifesto of Apocalypse reveals the group's concern with subjectivity: they rejected the machine and mechanistic thinking for greater aesthetic freedom, they asserted that no political program could provide aesthetic freedom, and they supported myth in art as "a personal means of reintegrating the personality" in the modern age.[48] In a retrospective collection of essays, How I See Apocalypse (1946), Treece elaborates on the group's aims: "Apocalyptic means apprehending the multiplicity of both Inner and Outer worlds, anarchic, prophetic, whole and balanced in the way a man becomes whole and balanced when he has known . . . all the . . . paradoxes and opposites, in his own nature as well as in the world about him . . . a rich and fertile wholeness, a new romanticism, a broader Humanism."[49] Clearly these are problems

associated with Romanticism, especially the emphasis on inner and outer worlds and psychic wholeness. In the second Apocalypse anthology, G. S. Fraser linked Dylan Thomas to the group's concern for organic form: "An Apocalyptic poet, like Dylan Thomas, responds to a situation, not to a play of ideas; the situation may be obscure, but there is an organic quality about it."[50] Other Apocalyptic concerns find precedent in Dylan Thomas as well as in earlier Romantics. Thus Treece discusses the Apocalyptic poet as one who not only apprehends the world in its complex entirety but who then creates his own vision in opposition to it.[51]

Four years after Daiches' essay, Horace Gregory contributed an essay to Poetry, which devoted its March, 1947 issue to "Post-War Romanticism in England."[52] Gregory's essay, "The 'Romantic' Heritage in the Writings of Dylan Thomas," traces loosely an unbroken Romantic strain in modern poetry from the Symbolists through Yeats and Edith Sitwell to Dylan Thomas, dubbed "the central figure" of a contemporary "neo-romanticism" that includes the Apocalyptic Henry Treece as well as Walter de la Mare and George Barker. Gregory praises Thomas for achieving "a fusion of 'mythological' reality with individual perception" and invokes the names of Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth among others.[53] Obviously, by 1947 the idea of a New Romanticism covered a wider range of poets than Apocalypse, including two not mentioned by Gregory -- W. S. Graham and W. R. Rodgers.[54] As with the surrealists, whom the Apocalyptics claimed as their ancestors, Dylan Thomas again found himself claimed by a group he never joined. Still, the affinities were real. There is a kind of sad irony in Henry Treece's explanation as to why Thomas was appropriated to the group: "Why was Thomas chosen on this occasion? Because he alone of poets established at the time was in any

way sympathetic to this movement towards Romanticism."[55] This remark explains why Thomas survived the Apocalypse, which, as John Heath-Stubbs noted in 1950, contained writers who wrote so badly that "from the mass of critical verbiage with which the Apocalyptics sought to define their position it is no more possible, nine years later, for the wit of man to recover a coherent meaning than to reconstruct the song of the Sirens."[56] And, in 1958, David Daiches, who first introduced Apocalypse to America in 1943, looked back on the movement as a false dawn. Although, says Daiches, "it looked for a short while as though a new Romantic Movement was about to arise, after nearly thirty years of anti-romanticism among the avant garde," now Dylan Thomas emerges not as the predecessor of a Romantic movement but as a strong, isolated Romantic whose poetry development from the middle forties until his death showed "what the 'liberation' of the late 1930s was leading to."[57] Thomas's priority over the Apocalypse is further shown by the fact that two of the three key members of the group -- Henry Treece and G. S. Fraser -- later wrote critical books on Thomas.[58]

Thomas's single volume of poetry to appear during the "Romantic" forties was Deaths and Entrances (1946). Thomas's first major biographer, Constantine FitzGibbon, records that Thomas knew that this fourth volume of poems would probably decide his poetic stature. The critics had been divided in their reception of the earlier poems, and he could not be the promising young poet forever (Life 313). The critical reception was decidedly affirmative. Within two months, the first edition (3000 copies) was sold out and three more editions followed soon after (Life 314). Denis Botterill called Deaths and Entrances "the present culmination of an endeavor which has never faltered since its inception" and called

Edith Sitwell the only poet writing comparable poems.[59] Miss Sitwell herself saw in this volume the union of the material and the spiritual -- "he is a natural mystic . . . his roots are deep in earth, but his head is high in heaven" -- and she found the volume's showpiece, "Fern Hill," to be "of a beauty so profoundly moving, that it is hardly bearable."[60] "Fern Hill" was frequently compared to Wordsworth's "Ode: On Intimations of Immortality" without condescension, while the figure of the outcast poet, the hunchback of "The Hunchback in the Park," was seen to parallel Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer in "Resolution and Independence."[61] Other value judgments were less cautious. David Wright found "Vision and Prayer" to be "a great religious poem" while S. B. Jones asserted that "in this new volume from Dylan Thomas there are poems that will compare with any in the English language."[62] Following Jones in basing his judgment of Thomas on the later poems' final resolution of the dialectic of opposites that drove along the earlier poems, Hardiman Scott praised Thomas because he "penetrates to the enduring conflicts common to all men, which are inherent in the very rhythms of the cosmos itself" and then tries to resolve them in "the crucible of intense imaginative experience."[63] This emphasis on the power which Thomas claims for the imagination is often stressed. G. W. Stonier called Thomas's work "a poetry that jumps at revelations" and concluded that "Dylan Thomas, in this respect, belongs to the Blake category."[64] And Kathleen Raine, a poet and scholar of Blake, praised Thomas for what she saw as imagination's victory over a rationalist's view of nature: "Dylan Thomas sees nothing objectively. His world, the world of nature, of sex, of heaven, and of darkness, is all within him. This is a tremendous assertion to make in our time. It is an extreme

reaction from the poetry of Eliot. Not, however, as D. H. Lawrence was, to a large extent, by an affirmation of the bodily and instinctive. Dylan Thomas's man is emotional and imaginative to the point where the natural world is seen in depth as also a spiritual reality."[65] At least one demurring critic saw what Raine and Sitwell saw but did not like it, claiming that "the external world is not really Mr. Thomas's province."[66] Scrutiny's hit man for the occasion, Wolf Mankowitz, was predictable, finding in the poems "unity through atmosphere," "emotional logic," "artificial activity," and "clever-boy pranks in verbal gymnastics" that prove "Mr. Thomas does not offer very much to the literary critic for analysis."[67] Such voices this time, however, were in a definite minority.

In the forties, then, some reviewers had begun to make claims for Thomas as a poet in the Romantic tradition, especially insofar as the problem of subject-object relations and the imagination were concerned. More and more often parallels were sought among the High Romantics to explain Thomas's kind of art. In the fifties, Thomas published two final volumes before his death in November, 1953: In Country Sleep and Other Poems (1952) and Collected Poems 1934-52. Just as the Apocalyptic forties drew attention to Thomas as a Romantic by comparison, so the anti-Romantic Movement poets of the fifties provided a contrast to the same qualities.

The Movement, a fittingly unpretentious title, received its name from an anonymous review of works by Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, Kingsley Amis, and John Wain: "The Movement, as well as being anti-phoney, is anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked, commercial, threatened world which doesn't look, anyway, as if it's going to be changed much by a couple of handfuls of

young English writers."[68] These poets, as well as Philip Larkin, D. J. Enright, and Elizabeth Jennings appeared in two important anthologies, D. J. Enright's Poets of the 1950's and Robert Conquest's New Lines (1956). As a group, their common concern was, as Derek Stanford put it, "Bashing the Forties," which decade they regarded as self-deceivingly Romantic.[69] In his introduction to New Lines, Robert Conquest defined the group's position by a series of negatives: "It submits to no great systems of theoretical constructs nor agglomerations of unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and . . . is empirical in attitude to all that comes . . . What they [the Movement poets] do have in common is, perhaps, at its lowest, little more than a negative determination to avoid bad principles."[70] Obviously referring to Thomas, Conquest rebuked the forties poets who were "encouraged to regard their task simply as one of making an arrangement of images of sex and violence tapped straight from the unconscious . . . or to evoke without comment the naivetes and nostalgias of childhood."[71] The Movement's scaling down of aims is evident in the titles of some of their volumes such as Larkin's The Less Deceived and Enright's Bread Rather Than Blossoms. In Larkin's book the poem "I Remember, I Remember" glances satirically at Thomas's "Fern Hill":

> And here we have that splendid family
> I never ran to when I got depressed
> . . . their farm where I could be
> 'Really myself.'[72]

Kingsley Amis wrote a poem entitled "Against Romanticism" which exhorted, "Let there be a path leading out of sight, / And at its other end a temperate zone: Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot."[73] The style of the Movement poets was to be Graves without White Goddesses, Auden without revolutionary expectations.

Thomas and Romanticism also came under severe scrutiny in two critical studies by the Movement's Donald Davie: Purity of Diction in English Verse (1952) and Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry (1955). In Purity of Diction Davie lays the groundwork for a defense of his own style of commending the English poets just after Dryden and Pope (Johnson, Goldsmith, Collins, Cowper) for purifying the dialect of the tribe not by inordinate emphasis on originality but by restoring the poetical standards of the earlier Augustans. In a 1966 "Postscript," Davie laments "the tawdry amoralism of a London Bohemia which had destroyed Dylan Thomas . . . the greatest talent of the generation before ours."[74] In Articulate Energy Davie argues for the central importance of retaining prose syntax in poetry, and thus, as must follow, he argues for the central importance of rational argument in verse. Labelling Thomas's "Altarwise by Owl-light" sonnets as "radically vicious," Davie accuses Thomas of "pseudo-syntax." Quoting the last five lines of Sonnet VII, Davie comments: "Formally correct, his syntax cannot mime, as it offers to do, a movement of the mind. If the effect is simultaneity and identification, these sentences that seem to drive forward in time through their verbs in fact do no such thing . . . That the metaphors could in fact be broken down into successive meanings is irrelevant; even when the breaking down has been done for us, we cannot hold on to it when we return to reading the poem."[75]

Not all critics were anxious, however, to praise the Movement for its overtly anti-Romantic stance. Charles Tomlinson, in a famous review attacking the New Lines anthology, criticized the Movement poets' allegiance to "the moderate, the non-Romantic" as a cover for "a total failure of nerve" in the aftermath of war, the atom bomb, and the lowered

expectations of the new welfare state.[76] A. Alvarez called the style of the Movement poet "a kind of unity of flatness."[77] Significantly, both Tomlinson and Alvarez perceived the problem of subject-object relations as an important one facing modern poets. Speaking of the weaknesses of the Movement poets, Tomlinson cited a sniggering "self-regard" which he found odd for "a movement in writing which purports anti-romanticism"; yet this is a debased self-regard, not vitalized by imagination, and thus unable to relate inner and outer worlds: "A poet's sense of objectivity, . . . of that which is beyond himself and beyond his mental conceit of himself, and his capacity to realise that objectivity within the artifact is the gauge of his artistry . . ."[78] From a slightly later perspective, Alvarez exhorted poets to produce new work informed by Coleridge's theory of the Secondary Imagination.[79] Such exhortation, however, was for a slightly later generation. For the Movement poets, as Calvin Bedient has remarked, "by comparison with Yeats and Lawrence, with Dylan Thomas . . . most inhabit a world truncated in possibilities . . . None is so naive, so ready for a wager, as to attempt a resolving vision."[80]

That Dylan Thomas had attempted a "resolving vision" was on the minds of those who wrote elegies at his death and who reviewed his last two volumes, In Country Sleep and Collected Poems. Reading these eulogies and retrospective essays on Thomas during 1953-57, the same period that saw the rise of the Movement, one senses on the part of readers a belated realization that Dylan Thomas was indeed in some way a Romantic who attempted a resolving vision. Five days after his death Kathleen Raine wrote of Thomas's imaginative struggle to reconstitute the unifying vision of the Romantic child: "It was in the power of his genius to

speak to the primitive sense of the intense glory of life that we all have in childhood, when body and soul are undivided, or body is itself a kind of soul. Wordsworth wrote of such experiences as recollected: Dylan Thomas uttered his youth from an experience still immediate, yet with a technique that a lifetime could not have improved. He died at the extreme point beyond which none may carry such youth . . . Blake's words, 'Everything that lives is holy. Life delights in life,' might, in substance, have been written by Dylan Thomas."[81] Complaining in 1955 that the contemporary reader "has become so enervated, so calloused in his sensibility, so bereft of a complex, subtle and healthy emotional life" that he cannot engage Thomas's poetry, John Ackerman wrote of Thomas as the dead hero and harbinger of yet another new Romanticism. In support of his views, Ackerman identified organicism, pantheism, the creative power of love, a bardic stance, and the exercise of the Coleridgean Secondary Imagination as important traits in Thomas's poetry.[82] In a more despondent mood, Herbert Read in the same year saw Thomas not as one of the first but the last of the new Romantics: "It is too early to proclaim the failure of the new Romanticism -- did it not, in Dylan Thomas, produce a poet who continued the tradition on its highest level? But Thomas . . . is nevertheless an isolated figure -- he has no significance for our materialistic civilisation."[83]

The critical reception of Thomas's last two volumes lends support to Read's view of the poet as part of a tradition that extends from the High Romantics to the present. Although the first of these volumes, <u>In Country Sleep</u>, contained only six poems, four of these are long poems for Thomas: "Poem on His Birthday," "In the White Giant's Thigh," "Over Sir John's Hill," and "In Country Sleep." The reviewers concentrated on

these long poems, all set in the Welsh landscape around Thomas's seaside house in Laugharne, as poems of reconciliation between nature and the self. The poet as nature's priest exercises imagination as a sacrament, spiritualizing the material world. John Sweeney commented on the landscape in these poems: "Both vision and background this landscape is. Emerging from it are memories, associations, presences and omnipresences which become free and active elements stating the poet's feelings while at the same time they stand or hover or flow substantially in the scene before his eyes."[84] Other reviewers, recognizing the same qualities, emphasized Thomas's subjectivism, emotional responsiveness, and original imagery. At Shelley's expense, G. P. Meyer called Thomas a "wild Welsh wind" and "this later Romantic" while James Rosenberg called him an "almost violent Romanticist."[85] More quietly, Louise Bogan said, "he was as close to living nature as any Romantic" while Thomas Carter remarked of "Poem on His Birthday" that Thomas "as did Wordsworth . . . finds his salvation in nature, though he expresses it in words that might shock that early Romantic."[86] Clearly, as with Deaths and Entrances six years before, an increasing number of reviewers felt an urge to use the term "Romantic" or analogies between Thomas and one of the High Romantics to describe Thomas's poetry. This trend continued in some of the reviews of Collected Poems: 1934-1952.

As the publication of a collected edition signals a poet's invitation for a comprehensive survey of a good portion of his life's work, the critical reviews of such an edition may show unusual deliberation and may embody a more considered response than usual. Such was the case with Collected Poems. The TLS reviewer defined Thomas's poems as a fusion of autobiographical truth and an imaginative vision that could transform the

outer world: "If Shelley was right in claiming that poetry 'creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration,' then Mr. Thomas is a poet of poets."[87] In a short but perceptive review, Edwin Muir saw Thomas's poetic development in terms of a quest for unity of being. The early poems dramatize an imagination trapped within the self. The later poems, however, document the imagination's successful encounter with the external world. Muir points to the exquisite "Poem in October" as a crucial text in the poet's quest for a relationship with nature as satisfying as that of his own childhood had been. Muir comments that "there is the remnant of the wonder of a returned traveller in these lines, after a too-long diving excursion in other seas." Wordsworth comes to mind in Muir's description of Thomas's resolving vision: "he is a poet of faith . . . it seems to be a natural faith, with supernatural colours . . . it is strongly of the earth . . . but all is irradiated with a light which comes either from heaven or from childhood."[88] Even Scrutiny's designated hitter for the occasion, Robin Mayhead, admitted begrudgingly that "Poem in October" was almost "a pleasant minor success," although Thomas's high ranking as a poet was still seen as "potentially disastrous for the future of English poetry."[89] Most commentators, however, emphasized the movement of the later poems toward some kind of reconciling vision, disagreeing only on the desperateness of the struggle and the degree of success in realizing the vision. Hardiman Scott saw the unifying vision of the Romantic child at home in nature as a permanent source of strength for the poet, while William Empson saw in Thomas a loss of early vision and subsequent new-found strength similar to that of Wordsworth: ". . . Wordsworth felt the need of the same

process; he talks a good deal about the loss of his first inspiration and struggle to become a greater poet as a result of that."[90] Finally, John Ormond, a poet and friend of Thomas, saw in Thomas's final poems a conflict between the forces of poetry and imagination on the one hand the forces of evil that threatened nature itself on the other. Alluding to Thomas's late poetic manifesto, "Author's Prologue," Ormond remarked: "the basic forces of decay, war, violence, time, death, unkindness, lack of charity and love, are the elements against which Dylan Thomas builds his ark of words. They are the Flood."[91] Such a titanic encounter between imagination and the forces of destruction external to the single poet seems to justify the view that Thomas is "a radical romantic."[92] Certainly, as Stephen Spender said in his review of Collected Poems, "A Romantic in Revolt," Thomas's poetry is an exercise of the imagination in an effort to overcome various dualisms in order to attain unity of being.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1]Ralph Maud, Dylan Thomas in Print: A Bibliographical History (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), pp. 118, 130.

[2]Maud, Dylan Thomas in Print, p. 89.

[3]cited in Henry Treece, Dylan Thomas (London: Lindsay Drummond), p. 141.

[4]At the 1974 Dylan Thomas Summer School (Swansea) John Ormond, a poet and friend of Thomas, told the story that Thomas arose at daybreak to read Ormond's review of Collected Poems that was appearing in the South Wales Evening Post for November 8, 1952 -- two days before the official publication date of the book (November 10). Ormond's was thus the first review to appear anywhere and Thomas was eager to read it.

[5]Stephen Spender, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, Horizon, 13 (April, 1946), 221, 233.

[6]Stephen Spender, Poetry Since 1939 (1946; rpt. n.p.: The Folcroft Press, 1970), p. 42.

[7]Stephen Spender, "Dylan Thomas," Britain Today, January 1954, p. 16.

[8]Spender's poem, "Dylan Thomas," an epigraph to this study, is yet another attempt to evaluate the poet.

[9]Chapter II is an investigation of this problem as a feature of Romanticism.

[10]Stephen Spender, "A Romantic in Revolt," rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The Spectator, 5 December 1952, pp. 780-81.

[11]Spender, "A Romantic in Revolt," p. 781.

[12]Spender, "A Romantic in Revolt," p. 781.

[13]Spender, "A Romantic in Revolt," p. 781.

[14]Spender, "A Romantic in Revolt," p. 781.

[15]Percy Shelley, Shelley's Prose, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1954), pp. 282-83.

[16]Dylan Thomas, "On Reading His Poetry," Mademoiselle, July 1956, p. 37.

[17]Marjorie Adix, Untitled Interview with Dylan Thomas, in Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, ed. E. W. Tedlock (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 65.

[18]Dylan Thomas, "On Reading His Poetry," p. 37.

[19]quoted in Julian Symons, The Thirties: A Dream Revolved (London: Cresset, 1960), p. 9.

[20]A. T. Tolley, The Poetry of the Thirties (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 30.

[21]in The God That Failed, ed. Richard Crossman (New York: Harper, 1952), pp. 229-73.

[22]Spender, Poetry Since 1939, p. 8.

[23]quoted in Robin Skelton, "Introduction" to Poetry of the Thirties (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 34.

[24]Edith Sitwell, rev. of 18 Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The London Mercury, 33 (February, 1936), 386.

[25]Edith Sitwell, "Foreward: The Young Dylan Thomas," in Dylan Thomas: A Bibliography by J. A. Rolph (1956; rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. xiii-xiv.

[26]Rev. of 18 Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Times Literary Supplement, 14 March 1935, p. 163, col. 2.

[27]Rev. of Twenty-Five Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Times Literary Supplement, 19 September 1936, p. 750, cols. 2-3.

[28]Rev. of The Map of Love, by Dylan Thomas, Times Literary Supplement, 26 August 1939, p. 499, col. 4.

[29]Rev. of 18 Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The Criterion, 14 (April, 1935), 497.

[30]Maud, Dylan Thomas in Print, p. 124.

[31]Philip Toynbee, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The Observer, 9 November 1952; the famous excerpt rpt. on subsequent dust jacket or back cover (paperback) of Collected Poems.

[32]John Wain, "Dylan Thomas: A Review of His Collected Poems," in Preliminary Essays (London: Macmillan, 1957); rpt. in A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, ed. John Malcolm Brinnin (New York: Crowell, 1960), p. 68.

[33]Michael Cullis, "Mr. Thomas and Mr. Auden," Purpose, 9 (April-June, 1937), 103.

[34]Michael Roberts, rev. of Twenty-Five Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The London Mercury, 34 (October, 1936), 555.

[35]Gilbert Armitage, rev. of Twenty-Five Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The English Review, 64 (February, 1937), 255; A. T. G. Edwards, rev. of The Map of Love, by Dylan Thomas, Western Mail, 24 August 1939, p. 9, col. 5.

[36]Geoffrey Grigson, "How Much Me Now Your Acrobatics Amaze," in The Harp of Aeolus and Other Essays (London: Routledge, 1949); rpt. in A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, ed. John Malcolm Brinnin, p. 122.

[37]F. R. Leavis, "The Liberation of Poetry," Scrutiny, 8 (Spring, 1943), 212-15.

[38]Maud, Dylan Thomas in Print, p. 134.

[39]Rev. of 18 Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The European Quarterly, 1 (February, 1935), 274.

[40]C. Day Lewis, "Autumn Verse," Life and Letters Today, 15 (Winter, 1936), 40.

[41]Hugh MacDiarmid, "The English Literary Left," The Voice of Scotland, 2 (June-August, 1939), 6.

[42]Edwin Muir, rev. of The Map of Love, by Dylan Thomas, Purpose, 11 (October-December, 1939), 241.

[43]Walford Davies, "Introduction" to Selected Poems of Dylan Thomas (London: Dent, 1974), p. 7.

[44]John Wain, "English Poetry: The Immediate Situation," Sewanee Review, 65 (Spring, 1957), 356.

[45]quoted in Robin Skelton, "Introduction" to Poetry of the Forties (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 17-18.

[46]Skelton, "Introduction," Poetry of the Forties, p. 16.

[47]David Daiches, "Contemporary Poetry in Britain," Poetry, 62 (June, 1943), 158.

[48]C. L. Boltz, Crown to Mend (London: Hamilton, 1945), p. 114.

[49]Henry Treece, How I See Apocalypse (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946), p. 21.

[50]quoted in The White Horseman: prose and verse of the new apocalypse, eds. J. F. Hendry and Henry Treece (London: Routledge, 1941), p. 14.

[51]quoted in Robin Skelton, "Introduction," Poetry of the Forties, pp. 23-24.

[52]Poetry, 59 (March, 1947).

[53]Horace Gregory, "The 'Romantic' Heritage in the Writings of Dylan Thomas," Poetry, 59 (March, 1947), 326-36.

[54]Walford Davies, "Introduction" to Selected Poems, p. 6.

[55]Treece, Dylan Thomas, p. 107.

[56]quoted in Robin Skelton, "Introduction," Poetry of the Forties, p. 25.

[57]David Daiches, The Present Age in British Literature, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 53-54.

[58]Henry Treece, Dylan Thomas (1949; see n. 3); G. S. Fraser, Dylan Thomas (London: Longmans, 1957).

[59]Denis Botterill, "Among the Younger Poets," Life and Letters Today, 51 (November, 1944), 93.

[60]Edith Sitwell, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, Our Time, 5 (April, 1946), 198.

[61]Horace Gregory, "The 'Romantic' Heritage," p. 334; David Wright, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, World Review, June 1946, p. 69.

[62]Wright, p. 69; S. B. Jones, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, The Welsh Review, 5 (June, 1946), 145.

[63]Hardiman Scott, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, Outposts No. 7 (1947), p. 12.

[64]G. W. Stonier, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, New Statesman, 2 March 1946, p. 160.

[65]Kathleen Raine, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, The New English Review, 12 (May, 1946)84.

[66]Rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, The Wind and the Rain, 3 (Autumn, 1946), 161.

[67]Wolf Mankowitz, rev. of Deaths and Entrances, by Dylan Thomas, Scrutiny, 14 (Summer, 1946), 62-67.

[68]quoted in David Timms, Philip Larkin (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), p. 11.

[69]Derek Stanford, Dylan Thomas (1954; rpt. London: Spearman, rev. 1964), p. 190.

[70]quoted in A. Alvarez, "Introduction" to The New Poetry (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 23.

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[72]Philip Larkin, The Less Deceived (London: The Marvell Press, 1955), p. 38.

[73]Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, eds. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 1012-13.

[74]Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse (1952; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 198.

[75]Donald Davie, Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1955), pp. 125-26.

[76]Charles Tomlinson, rev. of New Lines, Essays in Criticism, 7 (1957), 208, 215.

[77]Alvarez, p. 24.

[78]Tomlinson, pp. 213, 215.

[79]Alvarez, p. 32.

[80]Calvin Bedient, Eight Contemporary Poets (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. viii.

[81]Kathleen Raine, "Dylan Thomas," The New Statesman, 14 November, 1953), p. 594.

[82]John Ackerman, "Dylan Thomas: The New Romanticism and Its Significance to Life," Lucifer, 53 (March, 1955), 30-34.

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[84]John L. Sweeney, rev. of In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, The New Republic, 17 March 1952, p. 18.

[85]G. P. Meyer, rev. of In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, The Saturday Review, 21 June 1952, p. 17; James L. Rosenberg, rev. of In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, Talisman 2 (Winter, 1952), p. 51.

[86]Louise Bogan, rev. of In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, The New Yorker, 2 August 1952, p. 65; Thomas Carter, rev. of In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, Shenandoah, 3 (Spring, 1952), 25.

[87]Rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Times Literary Supplement, 28 November 1952, p. 776, col. 3.

[88]Edwin Muir, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Britain Today, January 1953, p. 41.

[89]Robin Mayhead, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Scrutiny, 19 (Winter, 1952-53), 145, 147.

[90]Hardiman Scott, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Outposts No. 23 (1953), p. 14; William Empson, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, The New Statesman, 15 May 1954, p. 635.

[91]John Ormond, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, South Wales Evening Post, 8 November 1952, p. 4, col. 9.

[92]Dachine Rainer, rev. of Collected Poems, by Dylan Thomas, Commonwealth, 15 May 1953, p. 161.

CHAPTER II

SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE DEFINITION OF ROMANTICISM

Two statements by Harold Bloom in his essay "Romantic Poetry" exemplify the problem that may perplex anyone who would discuss English poetry from Blake to Dylan Thomas and beyond: "Romanticism resists its definers who can neither fix its characteristics nor its dates," yet "Romanticism still prevails today for all the modernist rebellions against it."[1] The term is protean, mercurial, yet insistent, demanding, and both in spite of and because of the arguments of A. O. Lovejoy the term Romanticism has not only persisted but has become an important part of an ongoing debate about the nature of the High Romantic period and its relation to Modernism.[2] Some critics apply the term Romantic to single periods, single poets, single poems. Others see Romantic poetry as a recurrent phenomenon. Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton become "Romantic," High Romanticism becomes the renaissance of the Renaissance, and Homer's Odysseus, not to mention Satan himself, becomes an Ur-Romantic. Further complications are possible. Is Modernism anti-Romanticism, recurrent Romanticism, or is it part of a single, ongoing period that begins in English with Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth? If the critics cannot decide whether the High Romantics are Romantic, how can they decide whether or not the Moderns are? Dylan Thomas, certainly a Modern by chronology, might thus be anti-Romantic, Modern, or a Modern Romantic.

Such rich possibility for confusion may await the critic who seeks to apply the term Romantic to the work of an individual poet. To avoid such confusion, two alternatives suggest themselves. First, another term could be found to cover more exactly the field of meaning that Romantic is intended to cover. After all, the English High Romantics never called themselves Romantic so why should the modern critic? The objection to this suggestion is that, if the urge to group certain poets under a single heading remains -- Neo-Classicists, Romantics, Victorians, Aesthetics, Moderns -- a change of name will not yield its own definition; rather, the definition must inform the name. This problem is not unique to critics of Romanticism. Monroe K. Spears, for instance, in Dionysus and the City defines Modernism's central trait, following Nietzsche, as Dionysianism. Furthermore, Spears emphatically denies that Modernism is Romantic.[3] Reversing Spears' argument but using the same word, Carolyn Faulk in The Apollonian and Dionysian Modes in Lyric Poetry . . . equates Dionysianism with Romanticism and uses the poetry of Dylan Thomas as an example.[4] The second suggestion, if one wishes to avoid the problem of defining Romanticism, may be some form of nominalism. Lovejoy turns in that direction when he calls for "a recognition of a prima-facie plurality of Romanticisms."[5] Taken to its extremest point, this argument could lead not only to the discrimination of national Romanticisms but to the Romanticism of Blake, the Romanticism of Wordsworth, and so on.

The most compelling reason for retaining the term Romantic is that put forward by a number of important critics of the High Romantic and the Modern periods. These critics concur in the belief that the various traits ascribed to Romantic poets may be symptomatic, secondary manifestations of that which is shared as a "common problem" by all poets

since the collapse of the Enlightenment version of the Great Chain of Being.[6] Most simply stated, this problem is that of the relation between the subject and the object, between the perceiving self and all external to it. In his study The Great Chain of Being (1936) A. O. Lovejoy distinguishes three principles of the Chain that were present from its formulation by Plato in the Timaeus through its final, Deistic embodiment in such works as Pope's Essay on Man. These principles are plenitude, continuity, and gradation. When the idea of the Chain of Being finally gave way in the eighteenth century, Lovejoy argues, man had ceased to believe that ultimate reality (being) was a homogeneous, unchanging whole and that such reality could be understood by the exercise of reason.[7] Consequently, the attributes of plenitude, continuity, and gradation became symptoms of an ongoing, ever-unfolding creation (becoming) so that ultimate reality was not seen as static and fixed but as dynamic, driving onward toward a state of completion as yet unreached. Lovejoy calls this conceptual shift "the substitution of . . . diversitarianism for uniformitarianism."[8] Two results of this shift provide the terms for a definition of Romanticism as an orientation toward a problem rather than a large cluster of necessary, universally present traits. The first result was to see God as an active creator, and the unfolding succession of phenomena in the universe as artistic process. Thus, man, the artist in particular, would do homage to God not by mirroring a static universe in a work ordered on rational principles but by participating in the creation of it through the exercise of the creative faculty of mind, the imagination.[9] Coleridge's formulation of A. W. Schlegel's ideas concerning this analogy between divine and human creation is his well known distinction between the Primary and Secondary

Imagination:

> The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a representation in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation.[10]

The second result of the breaking up the cosmology represented by the Chain was a disruption of an established relationship between subject and object. In addition to philosophical arguments by Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and others who cast doubts on man's ability to perceive the object as it is in itself and even on the independent reality of the object, the emergence of imagination as the central power governing the process of poetic creation meant that, at one extreme, the perceived object could be absorbed into the mind (the egotistical sublime) or else the perceiving subject could emphatically project itself into the object (negative capability), or the two might coalesce to form a new whole. Coleridge addresses this question in his essay, "On Poesy or Art." Rejecting the concept of a static universe (natura naturata) for that of a dynamic one (natura naturans), Coleridge defines man's moral obligation to interpret the intellectual significance of the images of nature in order "to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature."[11] The agent by which this identity is effected is imagination. In the famous description of the poetic process in Biographia Literaria, Coleridge describes the process of unification:

> The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to

> their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image . . .[12]

As a consequence of these new beliefs, the position of the poet was both exalted and threatened. Since the imagination of God and the imagination of the poet were of a kind, and since, as Lovejoy says, in natura naturans "God himself was temporalized -- was, indeed, identified with the process by which the whole creation . . . ascends the scale of possibility; or . . . God was conceived as the not yet realized final term of the process," and since the poet's imagination could creatively alter this process, then the poet might become a kind of god, self-redeeming Christ, or at the very least, nature's priest.[13] But what if the imagination envisions more than it can transform? What if the surrender of autonomy in the act of coalescence between subject and object is too great a loss? Harold Bloom, in answering these questions, identifies a central Romantic poetic form, the internalized quest romance:

> The center of High Romantic consciousness is found in each poet's difficult realization of the Sublime, a realization that internalizes the quest-pattern of the ancient literary form of the romance . . . High Romanticism can be called the internalization of quest-romance, with the poet as quester, a principle of Selfhood (manifested as excessive self-consciousness) his antagonist, and a Muse-figure his goal (frequently shadowy) . . . Love taken up into the Imagination tended to be the High Romantic formula for apocalypse . . . No burden could have been greater for poetry, and High Romanticism, risking everything by its astonishing ambitions, necessarily lost nearly as much as it gained by such aspiration. A vision that was meant to become a continuity became instead a discontinuous recording of Good Moments . . . poetry . . . became a study of the nostalgias,

> of the lost childhood of each creator . . . Self-consciousness, conceived as the Romantic antagonist, became the central Romantic characteristic. / Nevertheless / . . . we have been, and still are, in a phase where our poets are Romantic even as once poets were Christian, that is, whether they want to be or not.[14]

Bloom's final comment in this passage introduces the concern of the opening section of Chapter III. If Romantic poetry may be defined as that poetry whose main concerns derive from the problem of subject-object relations and the central role of imagination in resolving that problem, then may it not be argued that Modern poetry is largely even if unconsciously Romantic? A fascinating debate over this question has occurred over the last three decades, in large part as a result of endeavors to answer Lovejoy's famous essay on the impossibility of defining a single Romanticism. The consequence of that effort are comments such as Northrop Frye's that Romanticism and Modernism are two phases of a single phenomenon: "Romanticism, thus considered, is the first major phase in an imaginative revolution which has carried on until our own day, and has by no means completed itself yet."[15] Alluding to Eliot and other early Moderns who announced themselves as anti-Romantic, Robert Langbaum in his essay "Romanticism As A Modern Tradition" berates

> . . . those twentieth-century traditionalists who not only forget the subjective origins of their own commitment to classicism and Christian dogmatism but would deny to others the same road to commitment. In thinking that they have broken with the nineteenth century, the twentieth-century traditionalists make the historical mistake of identifying romanticism with subjective denial. They forget the direction of romantic thought. They forget that in arriving themselves at an objective position they do not reverse but fulfil the direction of romantic thought. Their very rebellion against the last century is in the tradition of romanticism, which would have every man and every generation start again from the beginning. While the position they arrive at, no matter what it is, even if it includes the rejection of the romantic

> route by which they arrived at it, remains within the romantic tradition as long as it has been chosen.[16]

Falling within the field of reference of such remarks as those by Bloom, Frye, and Langbaum, Dylan Thomas may emerge as an inheritor of important Romantic values. However, before turning to the problem of defining Romanticism itself, the well-documented history of the term "Romantic" may be summarized in brief.

"There is no word in our language which has a more 'romantic' history," said Logan Pearsall Smith of the term Romantic in his essay "Four Romantic Words."[17] Ultimately, "Romantic" can be traced back to the Latin adverb romanice (loqui, scribere: to speak, to writing romantically), which was employed to distinguish speakers of the ancient Roman tongue (lingua Latina) from the speakers of the rude vernacular (lingua Romanica) spoken by barbarians in the provinces and later in Italy itself. The noun "romance," meaning a language that evolved from lingua Romanica such as French, Spanish, or Italian, derives from the adverb and is found in various forms such as romance (old French), roumanço (Provençal), and romance (Spanish).[18] The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) records this usage in English first in 1330: "Frankysche speche is cald Romaunce, / So sey þis clerkes & men of Fraunce." Even today, the French phrase les langues romanes refers to the vernacular descendents of Latin.[19] In addition to denoting these vernacular tongues, "romance" came to stand for the literature composed in these languages, especially the long verse tales in Old French such as The Romance of the Rose. In the seventeenth century, the adjectival form "romantic," ceasing to be merely a descriptive term applied to a language and its literature, arose in English to denote a quality which, though still associated with the old romances, also testified to an increased sense of importance

attached to the rational powers of the mind. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a growing taste for that which pleases the reason is illustrated in the widespread use of "romantic" to define an idea or feeling as wild, fantastic, extravagant, fabulous, or fictitious.[20] Thus Pepys records in his Diary for 10 March 1667, "these things are almost romantique, and yet true" (OED). Logan Pearsall Smith notes that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "romantic" was often linked with words such as "chimerical," "ridiculous," "unnatural," "childish" and other words of pejorative intent.[21] Even as late as 1805, as Irving Babbit found, a Mr. John Foster wrote an essay entitled "Application of the Epithet Romantic" in which he defined the term as equivalent to wild, visionary, extravagant, and exhorted the mature man to subordinate imagination to reason.[22]

The term "romantic" began to shed its negative connotations in the eighteenth century as it came to stand not simply for the qualities of the old romances as seen detachedly by the reason but for the feelings and impressions experienced by observers in the presence of striking landscapes. Earlier conjunctions of "romantic" and landscapes emphasized the quaint, picturesque likeness between scenery and the literary form. Thus Aubrey wrote of the environs of Sidney's Wilton and its relation to Arcadia: "The Arcadia is about Vernditch and Wilton, and these romancy plaines and boscages did no doubt conduce to the heightening of Sir Philip Sidney's phancie." In the eighteenth century, the emphasis began to shift away from the romance form toward a larger emotional or imaginative response on the part of the individual. Addison wrote in The Spectator (1711) of "the fine romantic situation" of the battle in "Chevy Chase"; Thomson in The Seasons described "oaks romantic"; and even

Dr. Johnson once wrote a passage evoking the sublimity of a romantic setting.[23] Lilian Furst describes the circumstances of the emergence of the later meaning:

> . . . in the early eighteenth century . . . the old romances were rehabilitated with the nascent interest in the Middle Ages, the Elizabethan period, the Gothic and Spenser. 'Romantic' could then mean 'captivating to the imagination,' a faculty to landscapes and scenes in nature too, again in a positive sense, often to describe the mountains, forests, and wild places commonly associated with the old romances. Thus by the mid-eighteenth century it carries already a dual meaning: the original one, i.e. redolent or suggestive of the old romances, and an elaboration that adumbrated its appeal to the imagination and feelings.[24]

Such an important term was not to be limited to the English language.

The French and German forms of "romantic" were taken over from the English and came into prominence in the eighteenth century. An early, isolated, and uninfluential borrowing aside, the French form romantique appears around 1776 in books by Marquis de Girardin on landscape gardening and Letourneur, translator of Shakespeare, both of whom label it mot Anglais.[25] An earlier French form, romanesque, was reserved as an equivalent to the seventeenth-century meaning of "romantic" in English -- fantastic, wild, chimerical -- while pittoresque denoted that in a landscape which attracts. The borrowed romantique included not only the scene but the arousal of feeling in the perceiver by the scene. Often cited as an example of this usage is a sentence from Rousseau's Musings of the Solitary Stroller (1777;1782): "the shores of lake Bienne are more wild and romantic than those of lake Geneva."[26] Similarly, in Germany, the older term romanhaft, equivalent to the French romanesque, was joined by romantisch, equivalent to romantique, as a borrowing from English in the late seventeenth century. Although romantisch appears

in translations of English works such as Thomson's Seasons, it found its greatest use in Germany as one half of the pair "classic and romantic" as those terms were used to refer to the works of the Middle Ages as opposed to those of Greece and Rome. Goethe claimed that he and Schiller began the debate over the virtues of romantic versus classical art which was further popularized in the writings of the two Schlegel brothers, Frederick and August Wilhelm.[27] Frederick Schlegel, although claiming to have devoted 125 pages to the task of defining romantisch, arrived at various definitions. According to Lilian Furst, Frederick defined the term as equivalent to modern, then denied the equivalency; he defined it to mean emotional content in a form structured by imagination, then, upon converting to Catholicism, defined romantisch as "Christian."[28] This debate between classical and romantic points of view was carried from Germany into France by Madame de Stael who popularized the use of romantique as a purely literary term. Madame de Stael's De l'Allemagne (1813) and Frederick Schlegel's Dramatic Art and Literature (trans. 1815) had a similar effect on the usage of the term in England.[29] The OED cites an 1830 issue of Blackwood's Magazine as an example of the use of "romanticist" to mean an adherent of the literary school: "The much-disputed provinces of the Classicists and Romanticists."

Unlike the Germans, the English poets known today as the Romantics did not apply that term to themselves. In their day, other terms were used to designate kindred traits: the Lake School (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey), the Cockney School (Hazlitt, Hunt, Keats) and the Satanic School (Byron, Shelley, Hunt). The word "romantic" does not appear in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Biographia Literaria, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, in Keats's letters (except for one reference to the names of girls

etched on the windowpane of an inn).[30] Nevertheless, many later readers have felt that these English poets possess something in common, while others have declared that the poets possess no single identifiable trait that both unites them among themselves and separates them from preceding literary eras. Thus, Lilian Furst, who believes that commonly held traits can be identified, uses a metaphor of "family likeness" to account for the variety in appearance among poets who nevertheless share the family traits of imagination, feeling, and individualism.[31] Conversely, Irving Babbit warns that many traits are secondary, symptomatic of primary traits that may lie hidden or may be only indirectly expressed.[32] Can Romanticism be defined? In 1936 F. L. Lucas said that 11,396 books on Romanticism had appeared.[33] By now several thousand must have been added to that total. Probably Logan Pearsall Smith makes the best case for retaining the term both as a period designation and to designate a recurrent aesthetic phenomenon when he says that in spite of inexactness in their use, "classic" and "romantic" are "tools nevertheless for which we have no substitutes, and we cannot, if we wish to write of the aesthetic problems still facing us, do without them." Like many later critics who joined the debate over Romanticism following the famous essays by Lovejoy and Rene Wellek, Pearsall Smith recognized in "romantic" and associated terms such as originality, genius, and creativity, a more than scholarly significance: "the fire still latent in them is contagious; they are ancestral voices which still prophesy war . . . the aesthetic conflict is by no means ended."[34]

Certainly for Dylan Thomas as a young poet the aesthetic conflict between "romantic" and "classical" values was not academic but real. In an early essay on the poetry of James Chapman Woods (1932), Thomas

acknowledged that Woods has "a vocabulary steeped in classical tradition" and that he is "a scholar . . . [and] . . . an accomplished metrician"; nonetheless, Thomas says, "these are not the things that will take him to heaven; skill and learning will not link him hand in hand with Shelley, Blake and Keats, stepping shadowy from dark to light; rather will they leave him in the dark, tied back to back with Matthew Arnold, and the dark figures of the early twentieth century poets" (EPW 114-15). Before examining Thomas's other statements on poetry in order to determine the significance of this identification of supreme poetic achievement with three High Romantics rather than with a Victorian or the self-proclaimed anti-Romantic Moderns, it is necessary to review the debate over the definition of Romanticism and that debate's significance in justifying the application of the epithet "Romantic" to a twentieth-century poet. The participants in the debate may be divided into two groups. First there are those who seek to define Romanticism by identifying traits commonly held by Romantic poets. Second, there are those who seek to define Romanticism by identifying a problem commonly faced whose presence may evoke similar or dissimilar traits, a similar or dissimilar solution, or a failure to find a solution but which unites such poets in a mutual concern in overcoming barriers separately encountered.

Both before and after A. O. Lovejoy's famous essay, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" appeared in 1924, critics have sought in an aphorism or a list of traits a workable definition of "Romanticism." Ernest Bernbaum once made a list of short definitions in his Guide through the Romantic Movement (1949). These include

> Romanticism is disease, Classicism is health. Goethe.

> The return to nature. Rousseau.
>
> The re-awakening of the life and thought of the Middle Ages. Heine.
>
> Emotion rather than reason; the heart opposed to the head. George Sand.[35]

Suggestive as some of these may be, none seems adequate to define a whole period or a recurrent phenomenon. Only slightly more helpful are definitions which grow into huge compilations of traits variously present among High Romantic poets. One example from an introductory essay to an anthology of Romantic literature may suffice. Therein, the editor contrasts Romanticism to rationalism, the former revealing itself "in a turning from a satisfaction with sober reason to an indulgence in passion and sensibility; from a confidence in the universality of reason to an emphasis upon the diversity of truth; from a compact stable society to an unstable, revolutionary society; from a concentration on the general to a search for the minute and the singular . . ." and so on.[36] The problem with such lists is that not all the traits may be equally distributed among Romantic poets; some traits may be present in only one or two poets, and a multitude of such lists may be drawn up with no two of them identical. Lascelles Abercrombie wittily complained of this difficulty in his book Romanticism (1926): "It certainly seems clear, that to allow romanticism to contain everything that has been referred to that capacious name, is to stuff the word so full of miscellaneous meaning that it will be no good to anyone . . . one poet is romantic because he falls in love; another, romantic because he hears a cuckoo; another, romantic because he is reconciled to the Church. The word may be intelligible in all these cases; but not very useful, unless

we can see that all these senses somehow converge, and give us common ground."[37]

The difficulty of finding "common ground" in Romantic poets for various traits is the subject of A. O. Lovejoy's famous essay "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms." Published in 1924, the essay drew its most powerful response from Rene Wellek the year after it was reprinted in Lovejoy's Essays in the History of Ideas (1948).[38] Lovejoy begins his essay with an impressive array of evidence to show that almost no two students of Romanticism can fix its origins, characteristics, or results. Romanticism has been said to have begun with Rousseau, Kant, Joseph Warton, Francis Bacon, Sidney's Arcadia, St. Paul, Plato, Homer's Odyssey, or even the serpent in Eden. As far as its characteristics are concerned, Lovejoy cites pairs of contradictory critics who see Romanticism as fantasy or realism, a love of the past or a love of the present, radicalism or conservatism, and so on. Among the descendents of High Romanticism are such odd bedfellows as the Oxford Movement and the French Revolution, transcendentalism and materialism, and the philosophical beliefs of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.[39] In the face of such confusion, Lovejoy argues that "the word 'romantic' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign."[40] Romanticism thus becomes a straw-man in the cultural politics of the New Humanists such as Babbit and More whose condemnations of Romantic values Lovejoy calls "like consenting to sit on a jury to try a criminal not yet identified."[41] Fearing rightly that the term will not be dropped from the language of criticism, Lovejoy proposes a two-part remedy to the problem of definition. First, scholars should trace the history of the term Romanticism

and the history of its use in order to determine how certain ideas came to be associated with it. Second, Lovejoy proposes what amounts to a charge that recent scholars have proceeded deductively -- assuming traits then applied to poets pre-selected as Romantic -- and calls for a return to a broadly inductive investigation of Romanticism nation by nation. This "discrimination of Romanticisms" and the following analysis of the constituent parts of each is the only valid basis, Lovejoy concludes, on which to build a definition of European Romanticism.

Looking back on Lovejoy's argument today, many critics would probably concur with Rene Wellek, who, in his essay "The Concept of 'Romanticism' . . ." (1949) directly answered Lovejoy by defending the following thesis: "I propose to show that there is no basis for this extreme nominalism, that the major romantic movements form a unity of theories, philosophies, and style, and that these, in turn, form a coherent group of ideas each of which implicates the other."[42] Wellek's strategy might be called the "cluster of traits" approach. Concentrating on the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century Romantic movements in Germany, France, and England, Wellek identifies a set of "norms" which exercise "domination" over a literary period as a whole, regardless of the particular extent of their presence in any one artist. These norms, when manifest, may be called a cluster of traits because they seem to interrelate significantly with one another to form a whole pattern. In Wellek's essay this cluster consists of a similar understanding among European poets of the character and function of imagination, nature, and the poetic complex of image, myth, and symbol.[43] The advantage of such a cluster over a long catalogue of traits is that each trait in the cluster can be presented as a function of the other exhibiting what Wellek

calls a "profound coherence and mutual implication." Thus, the Romantic view of nature is implicit in the belief that imagination is creative, organic. Nature is a symbolic language and the imagination creates symbols. Symbols, uniting image and idea, are built into myths of man's imaginative union with nature, and so on. Following Wellek's essay, other critics adopted the cluster of traits approach while some sought for a single, positive trait that would then emerge as the necessary differentiating characteristic of Romanticism. Later still, in his essay "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge," E. R. Wasserman, building on Lovejoy's analysis of the collapse of the Enlightenment cosmos in The Great Chain of Being, argued that the most promising single trait shared by Romantics was a single problem for which the poets sought a variety of solutions.[44] This problem is the problem of subject-object relations.

As a representative example of the critical shift towards Wasserman's argument, the critical positions of Morse Peckham, one of the liveliest and most prolific participants in the debate over the definition of Romanticism, may be reviewed. Beginning in 1951 with an essay that sought to fuse the three traits of Wellek's essay on the unity of European Romanticism into one, Peckham moved some years later to the position advocated by Wasserman; in fact, Peckham in 1965 described the thesis of Wasserman's essay as "the most important sentences ever written . . . on the theory of Romanticism."[45] In his earlier essay, "Toward A Theory of Romanticism" (1951), Peckham announced outright his intention of reconciling Lovejoy and Wellek on the theory of Romanticism.[46] Citing Lovejoy's argument in The Great Chain of Being that three new important Romantic ideas were dynamism, organicism, and

diversitarianism, Peckham argued that the Romantic movement represents a revolution against static mechanism in favor of dynamic organicism. This dominant trait, in turn, subsumed Wellek's triad in explaining the Romantic attitude toward nature and imagination (both organic) and the use of symbol, myth, and image (expressive of the dynamic interrelationship of nature and man). Dynamic organicism implies an evolutionary universe, becoming rather than being, in which change, imperfection, and the study of relationships rather than phenomena is of chief importance. Since the exfoliating universe is incomplete, Peckham argues, God as creator is still active as an agent within the universe: "in its radical form, dynamic organicism results in the idea that the history of the universe is the history of God creating himself . . . the history of God . . . ridding himself, by the evolutionary process, of evil."[47] Peckham adopts a new term, "Negative Romanticism," to explain the difficulty of incorporating Byron into his definition of Romanticism itself. Apparently analogous to Carlyle's category "the centre of indifference" in Sartor Resartus, "Negative Romanticism" is defined as "the expression of the attitudes, the feelings, and the ideas of a man who has left static mechanism but has not yet arrived at a reorientation of his thought and art in terms of dynamic organicism."[48] In spite of this formulation, Peckham, who at one point patches all three members of Lovejoy's triad into the phrase "dynamic and diversitarian organicism," reviewed his early essay ten years later in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations" (1961).[49] In this second essay, Peckham adopts a more radical position, arguing that Romanticism arises from the separation of the self from its societal role which had previously defined value and bestowed it on the self. Now, it is the self

which is the center of value, not nature or society. In the earlier phase of Romanticism, the poet assumes the role of Christ and redeems nature by the exercise of imagination. The self is seen first as the perceiver of value in nature and then as the portal through which value, divine in origin, enters the world. Later, the self, rejecting both nature and the divine as sources of value, places the origin of value in itself. Using this division between self and role as his basis, Peckham later explained literary history from the late eighteenth century to the present in terms of a search for the ground of value. The four stages of that history are Analogism (spiritual union of self and nature), Transcendentalism (redemption of nature by the imagination), Objectivism (non-spiritual, non-transcendental perception of the external world by the self), and Stylism (the creation of a unique pattern and value by the self which recognizes the external world as without ultimate value).[50] These terms may be seen as roughly equivalent to Wordsworthian Romanticism, Blakean Romanticism, Realism, and Aestheticism. In the twentieth century, Peckham adds, aided by the midwifery of Nietzsche, Romanticism completed its long birth:

> The solution to the Romantic problem lies not in attempting the impossible, not in trying to stabilize the self, but in continuous self-transformation, in continuously transcending tragedy, and comedy, and good, and evil. The Self . . . is an illusion, but compared to it, the world we know is but the illusion of an illusion. With Nietzsche, Romanticism got to the root of its problem and found a stable solution to its difficulty in instability itself, in conceiving of life as the eternal possibility for continuous self-transformation. And that continuous self-transformation and renewal of Self which is the distinguishing mark of the twentieth-century artist . . . is the triumph of Romanticism.[51]

Peckham's use of the phrase "the Romantic problem" anticipates not only his own more recent speculations on the nature of Romanticism but also

those of Earl Wasserman, with whom Peckham agrees, and those of Rene Wellek, who disagrees with Peckham. In a second retrospective essay (1965) on the debate over Romanticism, Peckham converts from the "traits" approach to the "common problem" approach, the latter having been developed in his own studies for some time.[52] Peckham now agrees with Lovejoy that it is an error in logic to set up a predetermined group of works to which the label "Romantic" is applied or conversely to pre-select a number of traits and then to call "Romantic" only those works that exhibit such traits. Peckham now finds the early essays by Wellek (1949) and himself (1951) to be inadequate, for both essays really fail to meet Lovejoy's objections. The only answer to Lovejoy's nominalism is the argument that what unites Romantics is a common problem -- the problem of determining the source of value in a world where the relationship between the subject and the object has become problematical, unstable.[53] Citing Wasserman's essay, "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge" (1964), Peckham asserts that Wasserman is in support of Peckham's own position "that it is the problem and the intellectual tools which mark a period, not categorical attributes."[54] The stability of this last position taken by Peckham may be indicated by his reassertion in "On Romanticism: Introduction" (1970) that the central Romantic dilemma was that the categories of the subject could not subsume those of the object, or vice versa. As a result, Peckham reaches a definitive formulation of the long-sought answer to Lovejoy:

> The corollary of the notion that Romanticism was the consequence of a cultural crisis is that what the Romantics had in common was a problem and that insofar as their work had common attributes, these reflected the fact that they necessarily had much the same cultural equipment to deal with it. It follows that the older attempts to build up a theory of Romanticism by discovering and listing sets of at-

> tributes must necessarily fail as was pointed out by Wasserman nearly a decade ago. The problem of understanding Romanticism is the problem of locating with accuracy its problem.[55]

The substantiality of the proposition that the problem of subject-object relations is the key Romantic problem receives further support from Rene Wellek, who agrees with Peckham on little else, in his own retrospective essay on the debate, "Romanticism Re-examined" (1963).[56]

Wellek reviews the impact that Lovejoy's "extreme nominalism" had on critics of Romanticism who "had given up such questions in despair and settled down to an investigation of facts and the interpretation of individual poems."[57] Repeating his argument that a literary period is defined by the "dominance . . . of a set of norms," Wellek rejects the idea that every author must exhibit every member of the set of norms to be considered representative of that period for "this would imply a monolithic period such as could not be found at any time in history."[58] Wellek still stands by his earlier triad of nature, imagination, and the poetic devices of myth, image, and symbol as "norms" for Romantic poets, but he rejects as incomplete Peckham's own similar answer to Lovejoy that posited "dynamic organicism" as the common Romantic trait. Peckham is faulted for introducing the term "Negative Romanticism" to cover the awkward case of Byron. This "purely verbal solution," Wellek says, is like calling symbolism "negative naturalism"; furthermore, Peckham's definition wrongly admits "nihilism" which Wellek also finds in Peckham's belief that the Romantic poets rejected the possibility of discovering a constitutive metaphysics in favor of relativism. In spite of these charges against Peckham, however, Wellek reveals changes in his own position which put him extremely close to the position that Peckham and Wasserman adopt on the "common problem" theory of Romanticism. First,

although still confident that "there is a growing area of agreement and even convergence among the definitions . . . of Romanticism . . . by responsible scholars in recent decades in several countries," Wellek shifts emphasis from his original triad of shared values to "one central and valid concept: the reconciling, synthetic imagination as the common denominator of Romanticism."[59] But in his review of recent criticism in English on the question of Romanticism, Wellek reveals a further shift to the belief that a "common problem" underlies even the common factor of a "reconciling" imagination (a problem must precede the need to be "reconciled"). Among others, Wellek praised W. K. Wimsatt, M. H. Abrams, and Paul de Man for their various demonstrations that in Romantic landscape poetry the interchangeable tenor and vehicle of Romantic metaphors, the inner and outer "breezes" of spiritual and creative activity in man and nature, and the dual tendency of language to reflect nature and nature to reflect language all testify to an emerging critical consensus.[60] Significantly, Wellek describes the consensus in terms which demote his own triad of common traits to the status of secondary symptoms:

> In all of these studies, however diverse in method and emphasis, a convincing agreement has been reached: they all see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great Romantic poets in England, Germany, and France.[61]

Even more emphatically, Wellek concludes his essay by saying that "progress has been made not only in defining the common features of Romanticism but in bringing out what is its peculiarity or even its essence and nature: that attempt, apparently doomed to failure and

abandoned by our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness by poetry which is 'the first and last of all knowledge.'"[62] Clearly, then, Peckham and Wellek, though both became dissatisfied with their own and each other's earlier response to Lovejoy in terms of common traits, both came to believe that Romantic poets share a common problem -- that of subject-object relations. One of the most convincing demonstrations of the prevalence of this problem among Romantics is that of Earl R. Wasserman in his essay "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge" (1964).

Wasserman reviews the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistemological problems that evolved contemporaneously with the loco-descriptive poem such as Denham's Cooper's Hill (1655) or Pope's Windsor Forest (1713). The authors of such poems, Wasserman finds, do not recognize any difficulty in the relationship between the subjective perceiver and the object perceived. The objectivity of the object is assumed; thus, the relationship between the mind and nature is expressed by witty analogy or "hobbling simile," not by metaphors or symbols that seek to heal a tragic dualism.[63] This dualism has its immediate roots in the work of British empirical philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke who questioned whether or not some of the qualities attributed to the object are not actually projected upon it by the senses or are determined by the nature of the perceiving mind. Other philosophers such as Berkeley and Hume speculated that the external world may be entirely a function of the mind or that our subjective posture inevitably prevents us from objectively knowing the nature of what we call the external. Because eighteenth-century poets did not incorporate these philosophical problems into the loco-descriptive poem, they left to their Romantic heirs

a crucial poetic form -- the meditative landscape poem -- without having exhausted its manifold possibilities as an instrument for expressing the problem of subject-object relations. This problem, Wasserman argues, is at the heart of both the poetics and the poetry of four Romantics: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats.[65]

Wordsworth's earliest landscape meditations, An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches (1793), follow the eighteenth-century conventions of moral analogy and simile in relating the landscape to values of mind. Soon, however, Wordsworth began to write poems about the child's sense of unity of being in a world that may be totally possessed by the perceiving consciousness. In such poems as "To A Highland Girl," "The Solitary Reaper," "Lucy Gray," or "Resolution and Independence," the poet appears as "the subject yearning to possess the object in some absolute relationship."[66] The girl, the song, the child, or the leech-gatherer become portions of a subject-object relation in which, Wasserman explains, "the object is perceived vividly, usually with great specificity; the husk is then dissolved; and when the phenomenon has at last become 'spiritualized' it passes into the core of the subjective intelligence."[67] This is, in Keats's disparaging words, the "egotistical sublime."

Keats himself presents the opposite extreme to Wordsworth. Far from wishing to absorb the vital principle of the object into the self, Keats strove for the projection of the self into the object so that the self might fully know and savor the object while simultaneously escaping the prison of self-consciousness. Wasserman cites "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as evidence, to which one might add the poet's desire to identify with the nightingale in "Ode to A Nightingale" as well as

Keats's famous definition of "Negative Capability": ". . . when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."[68] Wasserman describes the dissolving of the self in the object as a procedure which "requires that the self rise to increasingly more intense sensory ardor until it is of the order of the object's dynamic essence . . . [so that] . . . the object becomes progressively sharper, richer, more vibrant -- more, not less, itself -- as the experiencing self is entangled, enthralled, destroyed . . ."[69]

Unlike either Wordsworth or Keats, Coleridge sought to reconcile subject and object into a unity dominated by neither. Coleridge's rather complicated explanation of this position centers on the idea that the subject, in order to know itself, must be able to perceive itself as an object; thus, that which is infinite (a subject) and that which is finite (an objectified subject) become one, unifying the limited and illimitable, the self and the world.[70] Poetry and its symbols, as products of imagination, provide the necessary conduit between inner and outer worlds. In practice, poems such as "This Lime-Tree Bower" embody this process. There, Coleridge identifies his poetic self with an object, his departing friend Charles Lamb, who, as a known friend, is also a subject whose experience of a sunset Coleridge, now having a similar experience, can imagine. Conversely, poems like "Dejection: An Ode" document the disjunctive consequence of a failure of "the shaping spirit of imagination" to animate dead objects:

> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.
> O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does Nature live.

Finally, Wasserman explains Shelley's position that the distinction

between subject and object is essentially false. In Shelley's thought, the external world is denied its status as an independent object; rather, it is conceived as part of the subject -- its feelings and perceptions. In ideal moments men apprehend reality without recourse to the categories of subject and object so that, as Wasserman says, "true phenomenal knowledge . . . does not consist in bridging the gap between self and nature, but in withdrawing these illusory entities to their common source."[71] Thus, in a poem like "Ode to the West Wind" or "Mont Blanc," the poet depicts the subject-object distinction as a false division whose collapse defines reality as "a continuous mental act."[72]

Having surveyed the four poets, Wasserman concludes his essay with the proposition that " . . . the very fact that their positions do clash so directly on these terms, instead of being merely unrelated, confirms that they all face the central need to find a significant relationship between the subjective and objective worlds."[73] Since each poet, however, formulates this problem differently, each will inevitably create poems that reflect his individual orientation. The only "myth" which Romantic poets might share in common, then, would be a myth which embodied the problem of subject-object relations. Furthermore, if Wasserman in his book The Subtler Language is right in saying that "the condition of man has not changed in this last century and a half, and Wordsworth's predicament is ours," then the formulation of a "Romantic myth" to dramatize the problem of subject-object relations and its possible solutions would provide a convenient framework for an examination of secondary Romantic traits both in poets of the High Romantic period and Moderns such as Dylan Thomas. The most persuasive discussion of such a myth is Northrop Frye's "The Romantic Myth" in A Study of

English Romanticism (1968).

Frye begins his discussion of the mythological expression of this problem by defining the limits of the term "Romantic" as the period 1780-1830.[74] However, Frye is not implying that the Romantic myth is invalid outside this time frame. On the contrary, in an earlier version of this essay entitled "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism" Frye calls this time frame "a historical center of gravity" which created a myth that has not been superseded in the twentieth century.[75] The anti-Romanticism of Hulme and Eliot did not create a new cosmological picture nor was a return to a pre-Romantic cosmology possible; thus, says Frye, the Modern anti-Romantics can really only be called "post-Romantic," either rejecting the Romantic myth without replacing it or else developing their poetry within the confines of the myth.[76]

Romanticism, Frye argues, can be understood in terms of a major change in the mythological structure that had informed Western culture since the compilation of the Bible.[77] More deep-seated than any conscious shift in popular belief about religion, politics, or the arts, this change resulted from the same philosophical problems that, in the English tradition, became most acute in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers such as Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and others. Replacing ancient creation myths that were mother-centered and that described the origin of the world and of man by gestation analogies, the sky-god myth of Judaism and Christianity posited a divine maker, God as an artist who fashioned the world according to principles of reason. Proof of this lay in the Ptolemaic cosmological system which was geocentric and which understood the star-filled heavens to be a remnant of the unfallen world of nature and thus rationally ordered. The cosmos was seen as divided into four

levels: heaven, upper nature (prelapsarian), lower nature (postlapsarian), and hell. In the old cosmology, man identified himself with God's instrument of creation, reason, and thus he eschewed his kindredship with lower nature in favor of his identify as a social being, living in a community rationally governed and symbolized by the city. Eventually, the new science of the Renaissance undermined the empirical validity of the Ptolemaic system, thus severing "science" and "myth," the latter being recognized more and more as imaginative, not rational, in origin. The stars themselves were now revealed as equally corrupt as the sublunary world, not as symbols of the threshold to a heaven "up there" spacially. As the Chain of Being lost its foundation in reason, reason itself lost to imagination its position of dominance among the faculties of the mind. The old subject-object relation in which God and man, in opposition to fallen nature, shared in <u>kind</u> the faculty of reason gave way to the idea of nature as organic process, expressing the ongoing creativity of God's imagination, a creativity in which man could participate by exercising the same faculty in himself. In its most radical formulation, imagination in man may be identified with God or Christ while the Christian God becomes a tyrant of an inferior rationality. Frye calls this imaginative identification of man and deity "a recovery of projection": "Gradually at first . . . then more confidently, the conviction grows that a great deal of all this creative activity ascribed to God is projected from man, that man has created the forms of his civilization, including his laws and myths, and that consequently they exhibit human imperfections and are subject to human criticism." According to Frye, two results of this new cosmological attitude are (1) faith in nature as holistic and (2) the adoption of a revolutionary

stance toward human culture.[78]

The first of these two consequences of the Romantic myth, faith in the spiritual power of nature, led to an internalization of the three phases of the "Biblical myth": Creation, Fall, and Redemption. With the presence of God now absorbed into nature, Adam's brief prelapsarian existence becomes, in the Romantic myth, identified with childhood or else the racial memory's recollection of a pre-Fall unity between man and nature. Consequently, as Frye explains, the Romantics see man as having fallen "not so much into sin as into the original sin of self-consciousness, into his present subject-object relation to nature, where, because his consciousness is what separates him from nature, the primary conscious feeling is one of separation."[79] Romantic redemption, then, necessarily becomes a quest to recover unity of being, to heal the subject-object division, often by seeking unity with figures of the mother or the bride. Just as imagination replaces reason as the creative power in the new cosmology, so imagination as a form of love replaces grace as the redemptive power that heals division and changes society. Now the artist, rather than being a mirror of received truths of ethics or religion, becomes a revolutionary creator of the forms of culture. As a result of the artist's exalted new role, there appear new concepts of the artist as rebel or genius and of his art as autonomous, independent of other disciplines and modes of knowledge. The creative Word of God and the words of the poet engage in the same organic, creative process, so that the act of imaginative poetic creation becomes the central human act most closely linking the nature of man to the nature of God.

The Romantic myth modified the fourfold level of Christian myth by absorbing "heaven" into nature, by elevating the stature of fallen nature

above the "rational" construct of human society, by recognizing the moral ambivalence of all four levels, and by identifying all four levels with the human mind. Reversing the metaphorical directions of Christian myth which dealt with a heaven "up there" and "out there," the Romantic myth employs metaphors of "down" and "in" to describe man's search of "a hidden basis or ground of identity" with nature (whether beneficial or threatening), God, or death. This turning of imagination in upon the self in the search for unity of being explains the emergence of a distinctly Romantic form of the quest romance. Frye explains:

> The most comprehensive and central of all Romantic themes, then, is a romance with the poet for hero. The theme of this romance form is the attaining of an expanded consciousness, the sense of identity with God and nature which is the total human heritage, so far as the limited perspective of the human situation can grasp it. To use the traditional metaphors, the great Romantic theme is the attaining of an apocalyptic vision by a fallen but potentially regenerate mind. Such an event, taking place in an individual consciousness, may become a sign of a greater social awakening, but the latter is usually implied in it or takes place offstage.[80]

In such a romance, crucial events are psychological, not historical, and the events of the poem, even if projected outward onto a landscape, still make up essentially the plot of a psychodrama.

The essential points of Frye's argument seem to be these: (1) that a Romantic myth of human destiny has replaced an earlier Christian one by absorbing the earlier myth's three major phases -- Creation, Fall, and Redemption -- into the mind as psychological events; (2) that the chief cause of the development of this new myth was the break up of the rationally based, pre-Romantic cosmology resulting in the emergence of imagination as the basis for a new relationship between subject and object; and (3) that since even today this Romantic myth has yet to be

replaced by any other, the Modern era and the High Romantic period may best be viewed as two phases of a single period. The usefulness of this myth lies in its ability to incorporate into itself various secondary traits of Romanticism. The Romantic poet's emphasis on the self, for example, far from being a sign of willful solipsism, may be seen as a necessary condition of the poet's fate in a post-Enlightenment world. Nostalgia for the Middle Ages, for primitive times, or for childhood may be symptomatic of this "fall" into self-consciousness and the desire for "redemption" that would bring unity of being. In fact, despite their detractors, for most Romantic poets the state of self-consciousness, far from being the goal of their poetry, is simply a living hell from which escape may be sought. In addition to an emphasis on the self, nature, whether seen as an object of union, an antagonist, or an object of redemption, becomes a focal point for the problem of subject-object relations. Romantic concern with love as a healing power and as a function of imagination can also be traced to the search for unity of being. Finally, poetic concepts and poetic forms associated with Romanticism may be understood in terms of the central problem that Romantic poets had to face and try to solve. The second half of this chapter is a survey of the critical understanding of these Romantic traits.

Of those critics who define Romanticism by its traits rather than by a shared problem of which such traits are symptomatic, many cite the trait of individualism. Especially critics who take moral positions in opposition to Romanticism isolate what they may term egotism, undue self-regard, or solipsism in their arguments against continued critical esteem of the Romantics. J. J. Saunders in <u>The Age of Revolution</u> found Romanti-

cism "vitiated by grave defects" of which the worst was that "it was self-conscious, neurotic, and unbalanced" so that "the restraint, the decorum, the order which had characterized classicism was thrown to the winds and the freedom of the Romantics speedily degenerated into license, a quest for mere novelty, an outrageous flouting of accepted conventions, a determination to be different from other men . . ."[81] Even Lovejoy, among the many Romanticisms which he distinguished, found that ". . . of the Romantic ideal . . . the first and great commandment is: 'Be yourself, which is to say, be unique!'"[82] T. E. Hulme, one of the most important anti-Romantic Modernists, contrasted "Romanticism and Classicism" on the basis of divergent attitudes toward the self: "Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get progress. One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite of all this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him."[83] A similar position is taken by Irving Babbitt in his famous study Rousseau and Romanticism (1919). Like Hulme, Babbitt espouses a return to "classical" ideals, the attempt to depict general nature, the probable, and to do so by imitation and the observance of decorum of style and thought.[84] As against a classicism based on moral choice and restraint in poetic discourse, Babbitt decries the "emotional naturalism" of a primitivistic Romanticism. Classicism as common sense, reason, and an emphasis on the representative upholds the pillars of civilization while Romanticism's intuition, imagination, and emphasis on uniqueness

lead to a regressive tyranny based on emotional whim. Thus, according to Babbitt, "the Romantic moralist . . . instead of building himself an island is simply drifting with the stream. For feeling shifts not only from man to man, it is continually shifting in the same man; so that morality becomes a matter of mood, and romanticism . . . might be defined as the despotism of mood."[85] Two of Babbitt's most famous admirers have echoed his indictment of Romantic individualism for a too exclusive emphasis on emotion. The first of these, Yvor Winters, understands the Romantic theory of literature as "self-expression" and criticizes such a theory because it "assumes that literature is mainly or even purely an emotional experience, that man is naturally good, that man's impulses are trustworthy, that the rational faculty is unreliable to the point of being dangerous or possibly evil."[86] The depth of Winters' disgust for the Romantic emphasis on the self and self-expression comes clear in passages where immaturity and maturity, disease and health, become synonyms for Romanticism and rationalism -- thus, while Wordsworth "matured" out of his early Romantic phase, Dylan Thomas remained "one of the most naive romantics of our time," and Baudelaire failed to "cure" himself entirely of Romanticism.[87] Babbitt's other famous student, T. S. Eliot, who was at Harvard while Rousseau and Romanticism was being planned, devoted many early essays and reviews to direct or indirect attacks on Romanticism. In the "Introduction" to The Sacred Wood (1920) he quotes a passage from Arnold's essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in which Arnold casts doubts on the final worth of Romantic poetry because of its "prematureness" and announces his agreement.[88] In the penultimate essay in The Sacred Wood, "Blake," Blake's failure to realize fully his great talent is explained: "What his genius required, and what is sadly lacked,

was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own."[89] And of course the famous passage in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" seeks to define a poetic process that evades the central tenet of Romantic expressivism: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality."[90]

In spite of views such as those expressed by Babbitt, Winters, and Eliot, most critics of Romanticism explain the Romantic poet's concern with the self as an almost unavoidable consequence of the historical circumstances that surrounded the break up of the old cosmology and its basis in reason. Lilian Furst identified "individualism" as one of three traits shared by all European Romantics. Finding the English Romantics the most individualistic of all, Furst sees this trait as centrally determining poetic form because the poem is a direct and spontaneous expression of the particular and peculiar nature and sensitivity of the artist.[91] Similarly, the Romantics' relationship to nature was determined by the need for a symbolic landscape onto which to project their own psychodramas. Such intense individualism, Furst argues, inevitably led to the emergence of figures of isolation, exile, wandering, and created the Romantic concern with a transfiguring power of love that could dissolve the iron boundaries of the ego and create relationships other than solipsistic ones.[92] Other critics tend to agree with Furst that the Romantic emphasis on the self determines other Romantic traits and that far from being a sought-after state of affairs it was often the source of agonizing isolation. Jacques Barzun sees individualism as a possible source of organicism as the chief Romantic metaphor for the process of

poetic creation, while C. M. Bowra attributes the differentiating characteristic "imagination" to an even deeper Romantic affinity -- a shared conviction about the centrality of the self in creating fictional worlds.[93] The separation of the self from the world may be viewed as the self's defiant bid for personal freedom and imaginative autonomy. In his chapter "The Romantic Self" in Loss of the Self in Modern Literature, Wylie Sypher defines Romanticism in terms of such a self: "Romanticism was, in effect, an artistic phase of the enlightenment that originated far back in the eighteenth century; it was essentially a counterattack of the self on the world outside."[94] Harold Bloom also identifies a revolutionary self as characteristic of Romanticism. Describing the Romantic internalization of the poetic form of quest romance, Bloom comments on the self and its aims: "the internalization of quest-romance made of the poet-hero a seeker not after nature but after his own mature powers, and so the Romantic poet turned away not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself," an integrity which Bloom describes as "a dialectic of love . . . uniting Imagination with its bride, who is a transformed ongoing creation of the Imagination rather than a redeemed nature."[95] Less radical views of the nature of the Romantic self see the self's forced separation from nature as a fortunate fall that provides the self with an heroic opportunity to re-establish unity at a higher level of synthesis. This is M. H. Abrams' position in Natural Supernaturalism where he describes a double bifurcation of mind (reason/impulse) and creation (self/world) and its results: "Man's self-consciousness thus alienates him from the world and also imposes on him the terrible burden of freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and

evil. But this initial, two-dimensional fission between mind and outer nature, and between the mind and its own natural impulses, although it is in itself an evil, is the very act which releases the energy that sets in motion the speculative philosophy whose basic aim . . . is to cancel all cognitive and moral separation and opposition in a restored and enduring unity . . . Romantic philosophy is thus primarily a metaphysics of integration . . . "[96] Frye also emphasizes the striving of the self to find its "ground of identity" with nature.[97]

Whether the Romantic self is seen as defiant and estranged or yearning to be reconciled, there is widespread agreement that the self-consciousness of the Romantic poet is often a source of agony. Lilian Furst seems to blame the Romantic poet for bringing this trouble on himself. The ego's demands, she says, were in excess of its importance and blocked the avenues to love: "This is the crux of the Romantic hero's tragedy: his egotism is such as to pervert all his feelings inward on to himself till everything and everyone is evaluated only in relationship to that precious self, the focus of his entire energy."[98] However, another view of Romantic self-consciousness is that it is the interim period between original unity and a final phase in which reintegration into a higher unity will be achieved. Hugh Fausset in Studies in Idealism calls self-consciousness "the disease through which men must pass to spiritual health or pure consciousness" while Morse Peckham's expression of the Romantic formula is "self-transformation by self-transcedence."[99] Such programs imply that the ideal Romantic poet is a kind of hero of consciousness, passing through one apocalyptic metamorphosis after another. To undergo such rigorous trials, the poet would inevitably feel at odds with the inherited values of society yet at the same time would seek a relationship of love with his fellow men

to whom he would be a prophet. Frederick Garber in his essay "Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero" argues that the true Romantic agony was the self's ambivalent cycle of attraction and repulsion in relation to society. The glory of the Romantic self, Garber says, is its ability to transform that which is outside it; the tragedy of that self is the impingement of an unredeemed world on its borders.[100] Such impingement brings an abrogation of the self's autonomy by received social values, an action that is tantamount to a murder of the self. The ultimate fear of the Romantic self, Garber argues, is that the self can never be autonomous but is finally flawed by entanglement with the very society it wants to separate from in order to redeem by imagination.[101] A similar argument is made by George Boas in "The Romantic Self." Boas remarks that the desire of the Romantic self for reconciliation between its own mental faculties and with nature was a kind of death wish and that such desires led ultimately to the waters of oblivion -- the Collective Unconscious.[102] More hopeful analyses of the Romantic agony of self-consciousness include those by Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom. Hartman sees Romantic self-consciousness as the medial term of three -- nature, self-consciousness, imagination -- which, in a similar manner to Frye, displace the Christian pattern of Eden, Fall, and Redemption. If this analogy is valid, then the goal of Romantic poetry is not a nostalgic retreat to simple childhood (nature) but a progressive drive to a higher state (imagination) that, just as the New Jerusalem subsumes Eden in Christian belief, now in Romantic terms subsumes its own earlier phase of natural innocence. Actually, Hartman argues, the Romantics knew that a return journey to childhood unity of being was both impossible and inadequate -- witness Keats's speculations about the

Chamber of Maiden-Thought and Blake's "organized innocence," the first a rite of passage to a synthesizing state like the second.[103] Rather, the Romantics saw self-consciousness as a power that might be used to get beyond the state which it signifies. The Romantics "seek to draw the antidote to self-consciousness from consciousness itself" in order that the imagination might realize its fate "to separate from nature, so that it can finally transcend not only nature but also its own lesser forms.[104] The Romantic quest figures -- Faust, Cain, the Wandering Jew, Ancient Mariner, The Solitary -- and other exiles, outcasts, and wanderers embody the perils and frustrations of the ascent from divisive self-consciousness to the higher unity of imagination. This journey may also contain within it a secret metaphor for the act of poetic creation, itself a journey. Harold Bloom also finds the ultimate concern of the Romantic self to be a quest for a higher mode of existence than is afforded by a simple union with nature. The two phases of the Romantic self which Hartman calls self-consciousness and imagination Bloom calls "Prometheus" and "The Real Man, the Imagination."[105] To Bloom, these phases are "two modes of energy, organic and creative" -- the first, an urgent revolutionary phase in which the poet seeks to enforce direct, immediate political and social change; the second, a defeated withdrawal into the self to purge the self of its recalcitrant shadow, an untransformable residue that is the real antagonist to growth.[106] Should the imagination achieve autonomy, Bloom says, love is taken up wholly into the imagination (i.e., desire and its realization are one) and the result is Romantic apocalypse. Bloom separates Blake and Wordsworth, who achieved Imagination, from Shelley and Keats, who died at the point of transition from Prometheus to Imagination. If Bloom's radical inter-

pretation of Romantic goals is right and the Romantic quest is to rebeget the self and thus subsume the father into the self's autonomy, then failure to achieve the quest seems as certain as it is heroic. As Bloom remarks, "no burden could have been greater for poetry, and High Romanticism, risking everything by its astonishing ambitions, necessarily lost nearly as much as it gained by such aspiration."[107] Romantic vision became a collection of epiphanic moments and the higher synthesis of nature and self-consciousness became a nostalgia for a childhood lost beyond redemption. Romance becomes irony in Bloom's final judgment of the fate of the Romantic self: "Self-consciousness, conceived as the Romantic antagonist, became the central Romantic characteristic." More than anything else, Bloom argues, the ongoing concern with self-consciousness demonstrates that "we have been, and still are, in a phase where our poets are Romantic even as once poets were Christian, that is, whether they want to be or not."[108]

Two major categories of the Romantic self have been examined: (1) the self as the center or starting-point in the search for value and (2) self-consciousness as an agony for which no unambiguous cure can be found. Before turning to various critical attitudes on the Romantic view of nature, an important Romantic figure, the figure of the child, will be examined.

Along with the peasant and the savage, the child in Romantic literature can symbolize unity of being, in kind if not degree, which is the goal of the Romantic poet. Untroubled by self-consciousness, the child recognizes no impediment between self and world, and death is but a dream. One of the most famous Romantic statements on the child is contained in Wordsworth's headnote to the Intimations Ode:

> Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being . . . I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.[109]

A similar remark by Shelley is found in his "Essay on Life."[110] Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience are full of children oppressed by reason or society, while Coleridge, in spite of his reservations about Wordsworth's view of the child as "Mighty prophet! Seer blest" in the Intimations Ode, is also on record as associating the healing imagination ("joy") with the nature of the child.[111] Two views prevail concerning the nature of the Romantic child: child is either a symbol of regression, a corrupting nostalgia, a failure of nerve, or else it is a symbol of unity of being. If it is a symbol of unity of being, two interpretations of Romantic attitudes are possible: the Romantics actually wished to return to the state of childhood or they sought a similar kind of unity of being synthesized on a higher level and incorporating within itself the corrosive self-consciousness that is the great divide between childhood and the estrangement of maturity.

Of those who deplore the Romantic child, most believe that the Romantics sought to return to the "childishness" of childhood. F. L. Lucas in The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal sees the child as symptomatic of a corruption of rational discipline: "this Romantic relaxation of control seems like a regression to childishness. The Romantic idealization of childhood . . . is part of the Romantic dreamer's flight from the harsh, drab world of adult life . . . Childhood renewed has been spoken of as the gate to Heaven; it can also

prove the gate to Hell."[112] Babbit, who equates Rousseau with Romanticism, notes that a child matures and the vision of childhood fails: "a little sense gets knocked into his head and often . . . a good deal of the imagination gets knocked out." On the other hand, the Romantics are credited with having "discovered the poetry of childhood . . . but at what would seem at times a rather heavy sacrifice of rationality . . . rather than consent to have the bloom taken off things by analysis one should, as Coleridge tells us, sink back to the devout state of childlike wonder."[113] Even critics favorable to Romantic poetry may recognize in the Romantic child a symbol of vulnerability. In his book on Romantic poets as questers for a lost Eden, The Lost Travellers, Bernard Blackstone sees the figure of the child as vital yet helpless against rage, violence, and time. The function of the child is that of a wordless guide whose salient quality is a joy that comes from the continual self-transcendence of growth.[114] Yet it may be argued that the child does not guide us back to childhood but stands as evidence that unity of being once existed in us and may exist again.

One of the most important functions of the Romantic child was its dual role as an implicit criticism of society and its adult values and its position as an analogue to the goal of the poetic process itself. The child stands for imagination and nature, as against reason and society, the child's difficulty in comprehending the disjunction between its values and the circumstances of its environment being symbolic of the artist's similar disorientation. The child's innate innocence implicitly criticizes the corruption of social life, as the chimney sweeper's cry ('weep, 'weep) echoes through passages of Blake's "London."[115] Peter Coveney, in Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature,

attributes the development of the Romantic figure of the child mainly to the influence of Rousseau's Emile (Engl. trans., 1763). According to Coveney, Rousseau's primary concern was to promote the idea of the child as not a tiny adult but a creature important in its own right -- a "fully matured" child, not an "immature" adult. Rousseau discouraged the premature development of the child's faculty of reason and blamed society's bad educational theories for childhood failings.[116] Although it has been pointed out by Tony Tanner that the Romantics forgot that Rousseau's strictures had the ultimate purpose of developing a more adequate faculty of reason in the young adult, still Rousseau was instrumental in providing an example of what childhood should be -- a time of the reign of wonder.[117] The Romantic problem, faced especially by Wordsworth, was how to carry the powers of childhood into adulthood without diminution. As Coveney points out, in the Intimations Ode -- "one of the central references for the whole nineteenth century in its attitude to the child" -- the brave consolation of the ending is much less powerful in tone than the earlier passages of the loss of the visionary gleam of the child in nature.[118] Speaking of Blake, Northrop Frye sees the child as a symbol of a potential power of the self: "the symbol of the state of innocence, not because he is morally good but because he is civilized: that is, he assumes that the world is protected by parents and that it is an order of nature that makes human sense. As he grows into an adult he loses this innocent vision and enters the lower world of experience."[119] Thus, the Romantic child not only dramatizes the poet's rejection of society but simultaneously defines his own poetic destination as a participator in the ceremonies of innocence and unification. C. G. Jung as well, in his essay "The

Psychology of the Child Archetype," recognizes the figure of the child as representative as two states of unity of being -- childhood itself and a second childhood of post-self-consciousness, either death, or, in Romantic terms, the afterlife of imagination.[120] That those who dream of childhood are people who have been cut off from their roots (according to Jung) should not surprise those who see in the figure of the Romantic child an important, if secondary, symptom of the presence of the problem of subject-object relations, the self and the world, in Romantic poetry. C. M. Bowra quotes from a report on one of Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare a remark that links the Romantic poetic sensibility to the condition of the child: "'The poet is one who carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood; who, with a soul unsubdued by habits, unshackled by custom, contemplates all things with the freshness and the wonder of a child.'"[121] An interesting footnote to Coleridge's analogy is found in an essay by Wallace Stevens in which he remarks that children seem to be "creatures of a dimension in which life and poetry are one."[122]

Whether a child or hero of consciousness, the figures of Romantic poetry often reject the city in favor of nature as an object of communion or redemption, as antagonist, or as the background for the projection of inner states of mind. As the earlier discussion of subject-object relations and of the Romantic self inevitably included nature as part of the terms or their complements, this discussion will focus more on the recent critical concern over the role of nature in determining Romantic poetics and poetic forms.

One of the most commonly ascribed traits of Romanticism -- the return to nature -- has been challenged in recent years by critics who

claim that the salient characteristic of Romanticism, hardly being a return to nature, is actually a harsh awakening to final separation. This separation, of course, means that one of the possible responses is return, but it could also mean that identity with nature as it is portrayed in Romantic poetry, far from being the ultimate goal of the self, is an antagonist to imaginative autonomy. If nothing else, the history of the poet's relation to nature since the Romantic period shows that the desire for reunion has proven to be the less prominent half of the dichotomy while the self's sense of its own isolation has persisted with little abatement. However, no matter which of the two solutions is tried, the Romantic poet must at least confront nature and undergo what Harold Bloom has called "ordeal-by-landscape."

In Neo-classical literary theory, the word "nature" usually meant both the external world and human nature. Of the important traits of poetry, nature was certainly one, along with reason, order, restraint, and decorum. Yet nature as a trait of Neo-classical poetry meant the enduring, the typical, the universal, the regular, the general, the common both in human experience and in the observed qualities of the outer world. Nature corresponded to reason, the former governing the physical world and the latter governing the world of idea and spirit. All laws informing poetic composition were validated by reference to this definition of nature, for, as Pope argues in the Essay on Criticism, nature itself antedated even classical "authority" as the ultimate source of rules for the art of poetry. Thus, aesthetic principles could be said to be universal in so much as the human nature from which they were derived was universal also. Mimetic theory was also justified by this definition, for if nature is distinguished by universality, regularity,

and order, why would a poet distort that which, when rightly mirrored, must give a true reflection of man, the universe, and reason -- the ordering principle of both? As the Enlightenment version of the Chain of Being began to break up, a new view of nature became prominent. Nature was seen not as a fixed system, created by divine reason, now static. Rather, out of the self's growing sense of estrangement from the old cosmology emerged a view of nature as ongoing process, an ever-unfolding creation continuously expressing the divine spirit whose ordering principle was transferred to the faculty of imagination. The self and nature began to be seen as related because both God's imagination and the poet's operated organically. Thus, to understand the process by which it operated, the poet's imagination could project itself onto nature and might even alter nature by joining God in a joint project of participatory creativity. In addition, the Romantic view of nature was based on an increased emphasis on a particular landscape as a subject in itself rather than as a generalized backdrop to human affairs or distantly related moral commentary. J. H. Van den Berg, who traces the development of the Romantic "inner" self and "outer" landscape from Luther's essays and Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, describes the process of division: "almost unnoticed -- for everybody was watching the inner self -- the landscape changed. It became estranged, and consequently it became visible."[123] Romantic poetry is full of examples of such landscapes of specific places, and this emphasis on landscape led eventually to the development of a distinctive Romantic genre -- the greater Romantic lyric.

As Earl Wasserman noted in his essay "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge," Romantic landscape poetry developed in large part

out of the Neo-classical loco-descriptive poem. Unlike its ancestor, however, the Romantic landscape poem moved beyond the use of landscape as an occasion to deliver random moral apothegms by the distancing devices of conscious metaphor or analogy. Rather, it sought in the landscape and the creative activity incited by it a portal of re-entry for the self into communion with the natural world. Such communion of subject and object (poet and nature) gave rise not only to a distinctive metaphor for the process -- the correspondent breeze -- but also to a distinctive type of metaphor in which, ideally, "inner" and "outer" became irrelevant directional signals. Like the metaphors it contains, this greater Romantic lyric also reflects the central Romantic concern with inner and outer realms, its tripartite structure being composed of landscape, self, and a unifying communion of the two. The Romantic concern with place, the connection between symbolic nature and symbolic language in the metaphors of the landscape poem, reveals a desire only to unite self and world but also to break down the distinction between "word" and "thing."

The most common metaphor in Romantic poetry for the onset of the imaginative process is one that links the imagination of the poet, creator of the poem, to the imagination of God, creator of the natural world. As M. H. Abrams has definitively shown, this metaphor is the correspondent breeze.[124] By its nature, a breeze may be used to symbolize the vital power of nature of which it is a conspicuous part. At the same time, it may be equated with the inhaled and exhaled breath of the poet, a literal linkage with nature and the agency by which the words of a poem, "inspired" by the breeze of imaginative creation, are "spoken into" the world. A correlative of the correspondent breeze is the Aeolian lyre or

wind-harp, an instrument whose sound comes from the passing of the breeze through its strings, an analogue to the process by which the poetic faculty is "inspired" to creation and communion with nature. Although the name of this metaphor is taken from The Prelude (I.35), Abrams identifies Coleridge's Dejection: An Ode (1802) as the first fully developed example of the type. In that poem the rising winds outside the poet's cottage release his creative powers which had been dormant, until, by the completion of this new poem, both outer and inner breezes subside. In his survey of similar Romantic poems, Abrams notes that either an outer breeze can provoke the inner breeze of poetic creation (The Prelude, Childe Harold) or else the creative breeze may conjure up an outer, natural breeze (Ode to the West Wind). In any case, the importance of Abrams' argument is that what distinguishes the Romantic breeze from the innumerable analogies between inspiration and wind from Homer on is its emphasis on breaking down the barrier between subject and object, of recognizing an organic relationship between nature and imagination, and in humanizing the landscape:

> . . . the moving air lent itself pre-eminently to the aim of tying man back into the environment from which, Wordsworth and Coleridge felt, he had been divorced by post-Cartesian dualism and mechanism. For not only are nature's breezes the analogue of human respiration; they are themselves inhaled into the body and assimilated to its substance -- the 'breezes and soft airs,' as Wordsworth said, 'find / their / way / To the recesses of the soul,' and so fuse materially, as well as metaphorically, the 'soul' of man with the 'spirit' of nature.[125]

Abrams has identified a single example of an important type of Romantic metaphor whose ideal function is to dissolve the rationally perceived categories of internal and external, the subject and the object. This type of metaphor, drawn from a group of images capable of

simultaneous reference to inner and outer states, is the subject of W. K. Wimsatt's essay, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery."[126] Just as Abrams traces the correspondent breeze of the Romantics to Coleridge's Dejection: An Ode, so Wimsatt traces what has been called the "polysemous metaphor" to Coleridge's poem "To the River Otter." This poem was a direct imitation of a sonnet by William Bowles (1762-1850), a poet whose works, though now considered of little worth, seemed to the young Coleridge an attempt to link the feelings of the poet with a landscape in a more profoundly imaginative way than the loco-descriptive poems of the Neo-classicists. Although he later outgrew his earlier admiration for Bowles, Coleridge divined in Bowles' sonnets a latent possibility of uniting the subject and the landscape by using images which were derived from a particular landscape and which, as metaphors, corresponded to inner states of mind that "matched" the outer scene. Speaking of Coleridge's poem to the River Otter, Wimsatt says that "the metaphor in fact is scarcely noticed by the main statement of the poem. Both tenor and vehicle . . . are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of the metaphors by which reminiscence is described."[127] If Wimsatt is right, then the ideal Romantic poem might be one in which the esemplastic power of imagination unites tenor and vehicle so that they become interchangeable, thus invalidating "inner" and "outer" as directional terms. Ultimately, the barrier between language and all other phenomena might be broken down, God's Word and the poet's words identified, and imagination, by transforming all of nature, would fuse the literal and the metaphorical into a single mode of experience.

Wimsatt's choice of poems with such titles as Coleridge's "To the River Otter," Bowles' "To the River Itchin," and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (whose time, place, and circumstances of composition Shelley details in a note) suggests that one of the most important factors in overcoming this division between subject and landscape is the identifying of a specific place where interaction will occur. Roger Shattuck calls this concern with place "the most fundamental thing to observe" in The Prelude, a poem that may be read as a journey poem wherein the traveller stops periodically to meditate on significant internal or external landscapes.[128] The "place" is a meeting-ground in space between the poet and universal creation, just as the epiphanic moment, there evoked, may be a meeting-ground in time. These spots of time and place satisfy the desires of imagination so fully that to see and to create merge into a single action. Shattuck describes the poetic structure that contains the poet's encounter and interaction with place as an analogue to the tripartite sonata: ABC(A). Following closely the "biblical rhythm" of Frye -- Creation, Fall, Redemption -- the Romantic displacement of Frye and Hartman -- nature, consciousness, imagination -- and Abrams' earlier discussion of the greater Romantic lyric, Shattuck identifies A as place experienced in childhood, B as the sense of isolation from place, and C(A) as the regaining of a sense of unity that contains but also surpasses the unity of childhood.[129] Working toward the same "place" from a different direction, Geoffrey Hartman in "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry" links Romantic place poems to the Greek and Roman epitaph. Like the epitaph, the place poem or "nature inscription" commemorates a particular event and place, made significant by interaction with the poet. Unlike the traditional lapidary, the

nature-inscribing poet is free to elegize any place or moment and in so doing to make the inscription part of the landscape itself, a landscape hereafter inseparable from inscription which, in one sense, contains it, and which, in another sense, the landscape contains.[130] This sort of reversibility seems related to the reversibility in Wimsatt's analysis of Romantic metaphors in that both challenge the categories of "inner" and "outer." In any case, so central is this subject-object problem to Romantic poetry as a theme that the Romantics developed a specific poetic form -- the greater Romantic lyric -- whose very structure reveals its theme: a dramatic encounter between the self and a landscape.

Developing out of the loco-descriptive poems of the eighteenth century, the greater Romantic lyric began to emerge in its total form in Coleridge's poems "The Eolian Harp" and "Frost at Midnight."[131] The form was extensively employed by all major Romantics except Byron, the greatest single example of the form being "Tintern Abbey." Abrams finds examples of the greater Romantic lyric not only in the High Romantic period but also in Whitman, Arnold, Stevens, and Auden. Recently, George Bornstein has found numerous examples of the form in Yeats, Stevens, and Eliot.[132] Dylan Thomas's "Poem in October" is also an example of the type. The greater Romantic lyric may be distinguished from the loco-descriptive poem and from Bowles' earlier efforts by the dominance of the act of meditation over the description of the landscape. Rather than following the sights in order and attaching various moral thoughts to scenes conducive to analogy, the poet follows a structure determined, again, by the Romantic poet's sense of the separation of subject and object, the self and the world, and his desire for reunification. Abrams clearly emphasizes the relation of the subject-object problem to

the form: "the central enterprise . . . was to join together the 'subject' and 'object' that modern intellection had put asunder, and thus to revivify a dead nature, restore its concreteness, significance, and human values and re-domiciliate man in a world which had become alien to him."[133] Coleridge's own later argument in Biographia Literaria that the thesis-antithesis split of subject and object must coalesce in a higher synthesis is expressed poetically years earlier in his first greater Romantic lyrics. Abrams' definition of an ideal greater Romantic lyric is hard to improve upon:

> They present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carried on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.[134]

The three-part structure of the poem corresponds to the Romantic displacement of the pattern of the biblical myth into psychological and poetic terms. As Abrams identifies Wimsatt's polysemous metaphors in these lyrics (". . . nature is made thought and thought nature, both by their sustained interaction and by their seamless metaphorical continuity"), one might suggest that an ideal Romantic nature lyric would be one in which the self and the landscape are continuously linked by an unbroken series of polysemous metaphors, an incredible and seemingly impossible

task (yet attempted in Dylan Thomas's "Light breaks where no sun shines"). However, as Abrams defines the form, many examples can be found. In "Frost at Midnight" the poet moves from a description of a numinous winter nature (thesis, present) to his own unhappy childhood in the city antithesis, past) to his hope that his sleeping child will enjoy a communion of which his own child-self was deprived (synthesis, past-present-future). A variant of this structure is Wordsworth's "two consciousnesses" technique in which the poet revisits a landscape and is dismayed because the landscape of memory (usually pleasant) will not align with the landscape of the present. Like the correspondent breeze, the tenor-vehicle interchange of the polysemous metaphor, the nature inscription, and the emphasis on particular places in the landscape, the greater Romantic lyric demonstrates the centrality of the problem of subject-object relations to Romantic poets, a problem important enough to generate these various poetic devices to bridge the gap between man and nature. If the greater Romantic lyric is a distinctive shorter form common in Romantic poetry, the corresponding longer form is the internalized quest romance, discussed earlier, as defined by Frye and Bloom. Before proceeding to a discussion of the next important Romantic trait -- love as a mode of redemption -- it may be helpful to review M. H. Abrams' recent isolation of the "circuitous journey" as a Romantic form related to Bloom's formulation of the quest-romance.

In his notes on The Prelude in The Norton Anthology, II, Abrams discusses Wordsworth's poem as an example of the quest-romance. Noting its ancestry in the Christian "spiritual autobiography of crisis" such as St. Augustine's Confessions and Dante's Vita Nuova, Abrams distinguishes the Romantic form by its secularization of Christian values and language.

Faith resides in the power of imagination, the real hero of the poem, to redeem nature, the exterior journeys of the poem being metaphors or occasions for the development of the inner plot: "an interior journey is a quest, both within the poet's memory and in his poetic enterprise itself, for his lost early self and his proper spiritual home."[135] In Natural Supernaturalism, Abrams, expanding upon these notes, traces the quest romance, now called the "circuitous journey," as far back as theories of cyclicity in Plato, theories of the ever-returning and dissolving cosmos as universal androgyne in occult tradition, and the parable of the prodigal son in Christian tradition.[136] All of these theories of the nature of experience and of human life move through the stages of unity, disunity, and reconciliation. Abrams quotes from a letter that Coleridge sent to Wordsworth in 1815 expressing his disappointment with The Excursion, a poem which Coleridge criticizes by reminding Wordsworth that the original intent of the whole poem, The Recluse, was to present the "Fall" (Coleridge's word) into self-consciousness, the subsequent estrangement of the self from the outer world as a result of "'the sandy Sophisms of Locke, and the Mechanic Dogmatists . . .'" and the curative role of imagination in healing the division.[137] Like the greater Romantic lyric, the circuitous journey or quest-romance reflects its theme in its form. Unlike the greater Romantic lyric, however, the longer poem is an extended journey poem and its inner form may be best expressed, as Abrams says, by the figure of the spiral. The spiral is a more appropriate figure than the circle to describe the nature of the Romantic inner quest for new unity because the Romantics do not seek, as the Neo-Platonists do, a simple return to original unity. Rather, the Romantics seek a new synthesis which will

subsume both "lower" states of original unity and subsequent disunity. The motion of the spiral, encompassing again and again its point of origin, fusing in itself both circular and linear progression, is the ideal structural pattern to express Coleridge's thesis-antithesis-synthesis pattern outlined in the Biographia. Thus, Abrams is able to summarize what may be called the total Romantic structural archetype, an ideal form that stands behind a Romantic poet's whole work:

> The poet or philosopher . . . possesses the vision of an imminent culmination of history which will be equivalent to a recovered paradise or golden age. The movement toward this goal is a circuitous journey and quest, ending in the attainment of self-knowledge, wisdom, and power. This educational process is a fall from primal unity into self-division, self-contradiction, and self-conflict, but the fall is in turn regarded as an indispensable first step along the way toward a higher unity which will justify the sufferings undergone en route. The dynamic of the process is the tension toward closure of the divisions, contraries, or "contradictions" themselves. The beginning and end of the journey is man's ancestral home, which is often linked with a female contrary from whom he has, upon setting out, been disparted. The goal of this long inner quest is to be reached by a gradual ascent, or else by a sudden breakthrough of imagination or cognition; in either case, however, the achievement of the goal is pictured as a scene of recognition and reconciliation, and is often signalized by a loving union with the feminine other, upon which man finds himself thoroughly at home with himself, his milieu, and his family of fellow men.[138]

Abrams' summary of the Romantic quest introduces another important Romantic trait: the concern with love as an agent of redemption or reconciliation. Like the Romantic concern with the self and its relation to nature, love as an agent of reconciliation reveals the centrality of the problem of subject-object relations as the most promising candidate for the differentiating characteristic of Romantic poetry. Much more than with the Romantic emphasis on the self and the landscape, the idea of love as a healing or redeeming force deserves its status as a Romantic

trait because it is symptomatic of the problem of subject-object relations. Obviously, the poetry of the Western tradition, especially the poetry of Neo-Platonic and Christian mysticism, is filled with examples of lovers translated to a higher state of existence through Eros or Eros sublimed. One need only think of Cardinal Bembo's erotic tirade in Hoby's translation of The Courtier or Dante's Divine Comedy to understand the extensiveness of this tradition. In Romantic experience this love is allied with imagination, the most important task of which may be to serve as a conduit through which love may pass in order either to permeate the outer world and thus link it to man or to transform that world to the heart's desire.

Many Romantic poems emphasize the importance of love as a healing or transforming power. The Ancient Mariner ends with a formula for communion between the self and nature:

> He prayeth well, who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast.
>
> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.[139]

Surprisingly, The Prelude contains the words "love" and "nature" in a 13:8 ratio in favor of "love."[140] In Book XIV, Wordsworth, who identifies the poet's duty as that of bringing "relationship and love" to all, makes love half of his theme and links it to imagination:

> This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
> Without Imagination, which, in truth,
> Is but another name for absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And Reason in her most exalted mood.
> . . .
> Imagination having been our theme
> So also hath that intellectual love
> For they are each in each, and cannot stand
> Dividually.[141]

In Coleridge and Wordsworth, Abrams identifies the most prominent embodiments of the feminine principle -- the end of the circuitous journey of the quest romance -- as two varieties of love: friendship (Coleridge) and maternal love (Wordsworth). In the passage on the pleasure thermometer in Endymion, Keats identifies friendship and love as the highest two gradations of the ascent to unity of being:

> . . . But at the tip-top,
> There hangs by unseen film, an orbed drop
> Of light and that is love . . .
> Melting into its radiance, we blend,
> Mingle, and so become a part of it.[142]

The knight of La Belle Dame Sans Merci is frustrated by a femme fatale in his search for a similar kind of love. Negative Capability itself seems a variety of love, a going out of the self to mingle with an other. Like Wordsworth, Keats sees an affinity between love and imagination. In the often quoted letter of 22 November 1917 to Bailey, Keats remarks: "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination -- What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth -- wehther it existed before or not -- for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty."[143] Most of all, Shelley identifies love and imagination as parts of a single function. In A Defence of Poetry he wrote "the great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own . . . the great instrument of moral good is the imagination."[144] In his "Essay on Love," Shelley again sees love as a power capable of uniting subject and object: "Thou demandest, What is Love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves . . . This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man but with every-

thing which exists."[145] Neither friendship nor maternal love but sexual love dominates Shelley's view of that power. Bloom calls him the "Orphic priest of a healing Eros" and Abrams says that "his persistent paradigm is sexual love, with the result that in his poetry . . . all forces . . . are typically represented . . . by categories which are patently derived from erotic attraction and sexual union."[146] In broader terms, in one of the most detailed studies of love and the Romantics, Light from Heaven: Love in British Romantic Literature, Frederick Beaty argues that love was a central means of unification for Romantic poets: "it /love/ was a beneficial antidote to the solipsism and self-consciousness that beset highly introspective natures, breaking down barriers and divisions. For while creative imagination promoted the expression of individuality, there was ever present the danger of fragmentation; and love served as a means of restoring man's contact with his own kind, with social institutions, and with the supernatural."[147] R. A. Foakes sees Romantic love as an ordering force that could reshape human relationships and society as a whole:

> In their finest work the great Romantic poets are concerned with asserting a principle of order and permanence in the universe. Whatever form their vision may take, it always involves some kind of absorption of the individual in a greater unity; it may be the apprehension of and sense of identity with the infinite in a moment of intuition . . . or the union of love . . . each poet . . . faced . . . a central problem of life, the need for love and harmony in a society of individuals whose moral and social ties have decayed.[148]

Bloom makes the largest claims for the importance of love to the Romantics. As noted in the earlier discussion of the self, Bloom defines Romantic apocalypse as "Love taken up into the Imagination" so that desire and actuality are coterminous and one. Bloom sees this ultimate transforming power as the final goal of the internalized quest

romance, a love which is transcendent but which does not deny the body to become so. This love, Bloom argues, "must make all things new, and then marry what it has made . . . the man prophesied by the Romantics is a central man who is always in the process of becoming his own begetter, and though his major poems perhaps have been written, he has not as yet fleshed out his prophecy, nor proved the final form of his love."[149] That toward which love drives in Romantic poetry is often a female figure, who, as either alluring or threatening, may stand for the long sought unity of being or death. This love quest for the female figure brings us back to an earlier trait -- self-consciousness as an evil. In a discussion of Mary Shelley's character the Frankenstein monster, Bloom says that "a Romantic poet fought against self-consciousness through the strength of what he called imagination . . . /the monster's/ desperate desire for a mate is clearly an attempt to find a Shelleyan Epipsyche or Blakean Emanation for himself, a self within the self."[150] This longing for the female also brings us back to yet another trait -- nature. Frye says in "The Romantic Myth" that nature is traditionally seen as female and that most early creation myths were mother-goddess-centered. Thus, when the poet searches for symbols of reunification with nature, he may use symbols that, directly or indirectly, involve the mother, the bride, or even the sister.[151] If the quest for unity fails, these figures may emerge in their negative aspects as the femme fatale. Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony has studied the femme fatale from Keats's La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Shelley's Medusa to later incarnations in the figures of Helen, Salome, Cleopatra, Herodias, and other figures throughout the nineteenth century.[152] Frank Kermode has traced similar figures in Yeats where the figure of the female dancer, uniting image and idea without self-consciousness, emerges as a typical Romantic embodiment of unity of being.[153]

If these female figures are the Muse or anima, as Bloom argues, then the realization of such figures by the questing poet-as-lover is equivalent to the attainment of autonomy by the imagination. In any case, the problems of self and nature may be resolved or aggravated by encounter with a vitalizing or threatening embodiment of the female. Wordsworth's mother nature; Keats's corn-goddess, Ruth, bridal urn. Melancholy; the female in Alastor; Coleridge's Madeline; Blake's types of feminine will; Byron and Shelley's sister-lovers -- all are examples of the kind.[154]

The concept of love as a redemptive force may be seen as part of a larger Romantic tendency toward the displacement of religious ideas, language, and forms into secular experience. Many critics of English Romanticism see it as a form of extreme Protestantism in which the individual poet is responsible for his own salvation: "Every independent thinker, without any mediation other than the spirit of love itself, was expected to strive in Protestant fashion for direct contact between his own inner life and the Divine Being."[155] As noted earlier, J. H. Van den Berg traces the origin of the Romantic inner self to Luther, while Harold Bloom detects in the anti-Romantic position of certain Modernists a religious bias: "though it is a displaced Protestantism . . . the poetry of the English Romantics is a kind of religious poetry, and the religion is in the Protestant line, though Calvin or Luther would have been horrified to contemplate it. Indeed, the entire continuity of English poetry that T. S. Eliot and his followers attacked is a radical Protestant or displaced Protestant tradition. It is no accident that the poets deprecated by the New Criticism were Puritans, or Protestant individualists . . ."[156] Whether or not Bloom's conspiracy theory is valid (Richard Foster's The New Romantics details the aesthetic debts of formalism to Romantic theory), there is general agreement that an important

characteristic of Romanticism is its assumption of religious values and responsibilities into the domain of poetry. To Coleridge's parallel between the divine and human imagination one can add Blake's statement that "Imagination . . . is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed forever" and Keats's "My Imagination is a Monastry and I am its Monk."[157] Frye's scheme of the Romantic myth is based entirely on a displacement of the biblical rhythm into secular and psychological terms. M. H. Abrams explains this displacement in terms of the Romantics' desire to salvage what was valuable in Christianity from that which they felt could no longer be defended:

> The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced one had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity; yet to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values, may surely be viewed by the disinterested historian as a display of integrity and of courage.[158]

Geoffrey Hartman sees Romanticism as a crucial phase in an inevitable breaking away of art from religion, although the function of art remains the same as religion: in Romantic terms, the effort "to convert self-consciousness into the larger energy of 'imagination.'"[159] A corollary of this displacement, deriving from Coleridge on imagination and from Blake, is the idea of great poems as bibles. Some Romantic poems contain passages in which the poet-as-priest prays or blesses or performs a "marriage" ceremony of mind and nature. Lilian Furst argues that the Romantic image itself is both the essence of Romantic poetry and religious in function: "the star role of the symbolical image in the aesthetics of the Romantics therefore fits in with their conception of the function of the imagination, of art and the artist. The image is perceived and shaped by the divinely inspired artist through his special visionary powers

. . ."[160] The symbolical image, to use Furst's term, unites organically image and idea, mind and nature, and, as a central structural device of poetry, is one of the most common characteristics of European Romantics. Frank Kermode, in Romantic Image, has compared the incarnating power of the image to the Eucharist: "the emblem of a thing becomes the thing itself, and a truth of a different order acquires a physical presence"; such images thus become "ephiphanic moments," crucial memorials of the interaction of self and landscape, time and eternity, mortal and divine. M. H. Abrams has documented the persistence of the idea of secular epiphany from Wordsworth's "spots of time" to Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence.[161] The moment, the image, the image-making imagination, poems that are really structures in which such moments are the central showpieces -- all these concepts link Romantic and Modernist poetics.

A trait less widely shared by Modern poets (but one shared by Dylan Thomas) is the Romantic concept of the poet as his own Christ. If the creative power of imagination is in kind the same as that of God, if man has fallen into the sin of self-consciousness and division from nature, and if a reconciliation with nature or else a humanizing transformation of nature is the goal, then the poet who exercises imaginative power would be his own redeemer. As Morse Peckham says: "Man therefore redeems the world; and since in the poet the imagination is predominant, the poet is the primary source of value -- in traditional language, redemption. The Romantic poet thus takes upon himself the role of Christ; he becomes Christ, and he is himself his own redeemer and the model for the redemption of others."[162] The nature and process of this redemption depend on yet another displacement of a religious concept into a poetic one: the idea of the creative Word.

Implicit in the idea that the poet's imagination is, in kind, the

same as God's, must be that the words of the poet are, in kind, equivalent to the Word that creates and orders the universe. To the extent that the poet believes that his art is subsuming the responsibilities of God, he may believe that his words are usurping the power and position of the Logos. A corollary to the Word: words analogy is the idea that the ontological status of word and thing may be identical, so that the poem and the world may come to share the same qualities: organic structure, symbolic import, objective status. Paul de Man, in his essay "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," uses the analogy of a flower to illuminate the fantastic and virtually impossible task of translating the image into the status of an object:

> How do flowers originate? They rise out of the earth without the assistance of imitation or analogy. They do not follow a model other than themselves which they copy or from which they derive the pattern of their growth. By calling them natural objects, we mean that their origin is determined by nothing but their own being. Their becoming coincides at all times with the mode of their origination: it is as flowers that their history is what it is, totally defined by their identity. There is no wavering in the status of their existence: existence and essence coincide in them at all times. Unlike words which originate like something else ("like flowers"), flowers originate like themselves: they are literally what they are, definable without the assistance of metaphor. It would follow then, since the intent of the poetic word is to originate like the flower, that it strives to banish all metaphor, to become entirely literal.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination . . . this movement is essentially paradoxical and condemned in advance to failure. There can be flowers that "are" and poetic words that "originate," but no poetic words that "originate" as if they "were."[163]

Can a poem really be in the same way that a red wheelbarrow in the rain really is? The concern over the relationship of language and objects can

be seen not only in Wordsworth's famous lines on Simplon Pass, "Characters of the great Apocalypse, / The types and symbols of Eternity" but also in his note to "The Thorn" where he speaks of ". . . the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion."[164] A similar concern was recorded by Coleridge: ". . . I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis between Words and Things; elevating, as it were, Words into things and living things, too."[165] Keats's ideas that poetry should come as naturally as leaves to a tree and that a life of sensations would be preferable to one of thoughts are related concepts. Should the categories of word and thing collapse into one, the issue of literal and metaphorical truth arises. Yeats called Blake a literalist of the imagination; Coleridge's faith in the symbol was based in part on the fact that "it is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between literal and metaphorical."[166] In "A Study of Wallace Stevens," Northrop Frye develops a similar idea, seeing in it a solution to the problem of subject-object relations: ". . . a world of total metaphor, where everything is identified as itself and with everything else, would be a world where subject and object, reality and mental organization of reality, are one . . . the imaginative act breaks down the separation between subject and object."[167] In Language and Myth, Ernst Cassirer connects this idea to the mythopoeic imagination: "The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name -- that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the mythmaking consciousness itself."[168] This

idea that words might approach the status of objects emerges in the Romantic theory of the poem as heterocosm, a second nature created by the Secondary Imagination, analogous to the primary creation of God.[169] The sheer enormity of the task of transforming the status of words could also lead to a frustration with words, to the feeling that what the imagination could conceive could never be wholly embodied in language. Robert F. Gleckner has studied this side of the Romantic concern with the limitations of words in his essay "Romanticism and the Self-Annihilation of Language." Gleckner argues that for Romantic poets language is a necessary but temporary evil, a means of reaching the ineffable in "an act of unmediated intellection" whereby a wordless communion with ultimate reality might occur. As an ideal end, words would self-destruct in the act of making over the universe. Thus, says Gleckner, "words /are/ the poet's compulsive, endlessly repeated attempts to create anew the universe -- and failing, to re-create anew again and again -- an eternal cycle of creation and destruction by which the poet ultimately conquers time and space."[170] These two attitudes toward words and things, that they should be identified or that words should consume themselves like booster-rockets to project the poet into speechless gnosis, parallel the two key varieties of Romantic imagination, that imagination unites self and world or that it transforms the world to the heart's desire.

Like the concepts of the epiphanic moment, the poet as redeemer, words as Word, poem as scripture, and the power of love which it releases into the world, imagination itself may be seen as a part of religious experience displaced into a secular context. In fact, it was this very trait that the anti-Romantic Modernist T. E. Hulme singled out in his famous definition of Romanticism:

> The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. You don't believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You don't believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism. The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify, and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table. Romanticism, then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion.[171]

With a consideration of the chief faculty of that "spilt religion," imagination, this chapter will close.

The argument of this chapter has been concerned with the problem of subject-object relations and with important Romantic traits which are symptomatic of that problem. Inevitably, the imagination has been a part of the discussion insofar as that faculty's expression is dependent on the single self of which it is a part, its exercise for the purpose of transforming nature or uniting the self with nature, and its release of love into the world a part of the desire for transcendence or coalescence.

A. S. P. Woodhouse in his essay on imagination for the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics reviews the history of the term and its use.[172] According to Woodhouse, Plato was of two minds concerning imagination (phantasia), believing that the human mind might receive a true, God-created image of an idea but that the human mind itself was incapable of creating any such images but illusory ones. Aristotle saw images as embodiments of things and their relations from which the mind could draw its ideas; the image was thus an imitation of nature but it was not truly creative in itself. Longinus and Philostratus granted imagination a higher status for its ability to bring before the eyes images of that which is the subject of discussion. Still, from Augustine through Sidney, the imagination's power is basically that of

imitation, and it is usually seen as subordinate to reason. Although Bacon and Hobbes granted some creative power to imagination, their views of poetry as diversion and the temper of their age dampened the effect of their claims. In the eighteenth century, both Addison and Young gave attention to the idea or imagination as a creative power, but it was the Romantics who consistently emphasized imagination as a more important faculty than reason in the creative process.

C. M. Bowra in The Romantic Imagination says that, despite differences in detail, what distinguishes the English Romantics from their predecessors is their central common concern with imagination. Although the Romantics vary in their views on the importance of the material world, they saw imagination as a power capable of revealing a transcendent world or spiritual immanence in nature.[173] For Blake, the world of vegetable nature was only a portion of a greater spiritual reality that could be perceived by the imagination: "This World is a World of Imagination & Vision . . . to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself . . . to me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination . . . this world of Imagination is the world of Eternity."[174] Seen by the imagination, Blake once said, the sun is not a guinea-shaped disc but rather a heavenly host singing praises to God. Perhaps Blake's position is summed up in Kathleen Raine's proverb: "the imagination does not see different things, but sees things differently."[175] Coleridge's view of imagination has been discussed earlier. Imagination is the healing, unifying esemplastic power that resolves various dualisms, including that of the subject and the object, the self and the world. The fancy assembles various data; the Secondary Imagination, in imitation of God's Primary Imagination, creates using as its substance that which the fancy has gathered. As a product of imagination, poetry is a contribution

to reality, the end result of an organic process that is analogous to the organic process in nature itself. In Wordsworth, imagination is most often concerned with fitting the mind to nature (to Blake's dismay) so that the spirit which informs both may flow, unimpeded by false divisions of subject and object. Imagination is not a separate faculty from reason but is a higher reason that incorporates all separate faculties into one -- "Reason in her most exalted mood."[176] To Shelley, imagination participates in divine creation and searches for ideal forms behind appearances. Insofar as imagination releases the power of love in the world, it is a moral instrument. Poetry expresses imagination.[177] To Keats, who said "I describe what I imagine," who called himself a monk of imagination, and who felt that what imagination grasped as beauty must be truth, the faculty of imagination was the means by which the nature of the universe might be understood through identification of the self with the beautiful in moments of ecstatic union.[178] Such great claims for this recently elevated faculty of mind do not mean that the Romantics did not doubt their ability to exercise imaginative power or did not wonder whether that power performed what it seemed to promise. Blake railed at mankind in general for imaginative blindness; Coleridge bewailed the intermittency of the "shaping spirit" in Dejection; Wordsworth saw his childhood visionary power fade to glimpses and spots of time; Shelley seems in imaginative despair in the unfinished Triumph of Life; and Keats expresses doubts about the nature of imaginative vision in the nightingale ode and the desirability of a completely aesthetic existence as a figure on a Grecian urn. Nevertheless, the power of imagination as the sole efficacious defense against rationalism and materialism was of central importance to every English High Romantic with the sole exception of Byron.[179] Jacques Barzun gives a definition of ideal Romantic behavior

that explains this high regard for imagination: "There was a time . . . when a man could say, godlike, 'life is thus; but thus I will not have it. Standing on the intolerable reality I recreate.' This is the essence of Romanticism."[180]

Barzun's remarks suggest two final points to be made concerning Romantic imagination. The first is that imaginative creation is an independent mode of knowing. As noted above, many religious forms, terms, and values were displaced into poetics during the High Romantic period and many remain displaced today. The implication of this situation is that imagination was seen as self-sufficient, autonomous, with no inherent, enforced allegiance to theology or philosophy. W. Jackson Bate explains how this view of imagination led to an elevation of the poetic act that even today (in muted tones) remains current:

> . . . at any point along the spectrum / Hazlitt to Blake / imagination was conceived as noetic, as an indispensable means for the apprehension of truth. And it followed that art, and especially poetry as potentially the most open and articulate of the arts, was also creatively noetic. Accordingly, the arts had the highest possible justification.
> . . . . . .
> . . . as humanists we have since continued to repeat those very premises, even though we prefer to use another, tamer vocabulary or to cite earlier sources or authorities than the romantic if and when we can discover them.[181]

Morse Peckham even goes to far as to suggest that the Romantics came to believe that their predicament could only be resolved by developing a theory of knowledge:

> The answer to the problem of value, it gradually came to be realized, lay not in constructing yet another metaphysic, but in understanding the metaphysical process, in comprehending and explaining metaphysical behavior. Instead of merely offering another metaphysic . . . what marks the Romantic situation is that the Romantic attempted to get outside of metaphysical behavior, to look at himself . . . from right angles, to understand what he was doing when

> he attempted to explain experience in such a way that it became impregnated with value. When the Romantic talks about Imagination, this is what he is talking about.[182]

From a different angle, Northrop Frye also sees imagination as a mode of knowing, identifying it as a "greater gnosis" that is produced by love, idealism, and the breaking down of the barriers of self-consciousness.[183]

The second point suggested by Barzun's remarks is the importance of the organic analogy (especially in Coleridge) to explain the creative nature of the imaginative process. Organicist analogies are frequent in the critical writings of the various English Romantics. Shelley said that poetry "creates anew the universe," that it may be produced without labor, that poetry is infinite "as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially." For Keats, poetry should come "as naturally as the Leaves to a tree /or/ it had better not come at all." Even Blake uses an organicist analogy to describe the action of imagination: "yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce, but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies, but renews by its seed; so the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought."[184] M. H. Abrams has shown that Coleridge popularized organicist analogies and made them part of the critical language still largely current today. In The Mirror and the Lamp (1953) Abrams discusses five categories of organicist analogy, the implications of which are clear: (1) the plant begins in a seed (the whole, not the parts, must be the central focus of the poem); (2) the plant grows (a poem displays the process of its own creation and is an unending quest of unfolding); (3) the growing plant takes in light, air, water, earth (the subject-object barrier is removed); (4) the plant originates spontaneously (spontaneity, originality are poetic virtues); and (5) the grown plant is an organic whole (so is a poem, whose whole is

greater than the mere sum of its parts). Abrams wittily summarizes the extent of these analogies in Coleridge:

> . . . if Plato's dialectic is a wilderness of mirrors, Coleridge's is a very jungle of vegetation. Only let the vehicles of his metaphors come alive, and you see all the objects of criticism writhe surrealistically into plants or parts of plants, growing in tropical profusion. Authors, characters, poetic genres, poetic passages, words, meter, logic become seeds, trees, flowers, blossoms, fruit, bark, and sap.[185]

However, a major difficulty with the organicist analogy is that there seems to be no room for the exercise of free will by the artist. If all is naturally spontaneous, the poem should grow of its own accord; yet Abrams himself has pointed out that, however spontaneous the original impulse, extensive revision was not at all an uncommon practice among the High Romantics.[186]

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Harold Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," in The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, II, ed. Frank Kermode et al. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 3.

[2]Various dates for High Romanticism abound. Bloom adopts 1783-1830, the dates of Blake's and Tennyson's earliest volumes.

[3]Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: modernism in twentieth-century poetry (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 3-24.

[4]Carolyn S. Faulk, "The Apollonian and Dionysian Modes in Lyric Poetry and their Development in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1963, passim.

[5]A. O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," PMLA, 39 (1924), 229-53; rpt. in Romanticism, ed. John B. Halstead (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1965), p. 40.

[6]A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), p. 242f.

[7]Lovejoy, Chain, pp. 293-4, 296.

[8]Lovejoy, Chain, p. 294.

[9]Lovejoy, Chain, pp. 303-04.

[10]S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1956), p. 167.

[11]S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, II, ed. J. Shawcross (1907; rpt. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 258.

[12]Coleridge, Biographia, ed. Watson, p. 174.

[13]Lovejoy, Chain, p. 317.

[14]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 6.

[15]Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 15.

[16]Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (1957; rpt. New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 20-21.

[17]Logan Pearsall Smith, Words and Idioms (London: Constable, 1925), p. 66.

[18]F. L. Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1936), p. 16.

[19]Irving Babbit, Rousseau and Romanticism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), p. 3.

[20]Smith, pp. 67-72.

[21]Smith, p. 72.

[22]Babbit, p. 8.

[23]Smith, pp. 77-79.

[24]Lilian Furst, Romanticism (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 11-12.

[25]Smith, p. 80.

[26]Furst, Romanticism, p. 12.

[27]Smith, pp. 84-85.

[28]Furst, Romanticism, p. 7.

[29]Joseph T. Shirley, ed., Dictionary of World Literary Terms (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1970), p. 281.

[30]Furst, Romanticism, p. 10.

[31]Furst, Romanticism, pp. 13, 15, 25-26.

[32]Babbit, pp. 2-3.

[33]Lucas, p. 3.

[34]Smith, pp. 118, 114.

[35]quoted in Furst, Romanticism, pp. 2-4.

[36]Russell Noyes, "Introductory Survey" to English Romantic Poetry and Prose (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), p. xxi.

[37]Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism (1926; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 14.

[38]for Lovejoy see n. 5; Rene Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History," Comparative Literature, 1 (1949), 1-23, 147-172, excerpts rpt. in Halstead, Romanticism, pp. 45-52.

[39]Lovejoy, "Discrimination," pp. 38-9.

[40]Lovejoy, "Discrimination," p. 39.

[41]Lovejoy, "Discrimination," p. 39.

[42]Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism'," p. 45.

[43]Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism'," p. 47.

[44]Earl R. Wasserman, "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge," Studies in Romanticism, 4 (Autumn, 1964), 17-34.

[45]Morse Peckham, "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory," The PCTE / Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English / Bulletin, No. 12 (December, 1965), pp. 31-53; rpt. in The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina, 1970), p. 82.

[46]Morse Peckham, "Toward A Theory of Romanticism," PMLA, 66 (March, 1951), 5-23; rpt. in Morse Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism, pp. 11-14.

[47]Peckham, "Toward A Theory," p. 11.

[48]Peckham, "Toward A Theory," p. 14.

[49]Morse Peckham, "Toward A Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations," Studies in Romanticism, 1 (Autumn, 1961), 1-8; rpt. in The Triumph of Romanticism, pp. 27-35.

[50]Morse Peckham, Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1965), pp. 25-27.

[51]Peckham, Romanticism, p. 351.

[52]Peckham, "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory," pp. 64-65.

[53]Peckham, "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory," P. 78.

[54]Peckham, "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory," P. 83.

[55]Morse Peckham, "On Romanticism: Introduction," Studies in Romanticism, 9 (Fall, 1970), 217.

[56]Rene Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," in Romanticism Reconsidered, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 107-33.

[57]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," p. 107.

[58]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," p. 109.

[59]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," p. 113.

[60]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," pp. 125-26. These essays will be discussed in due course.

[61]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," pp. 131-32.

[62]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," p. 133.

[63]Wasserman, pp. 18-19, 22.

[64]Wasserman, p. 18.

[65]Wasserman's understanding of the subject-object problem is in full support of Lovejoy's more complete history cited earlier in this chapter. Nor is Wasserman by any means alone. That Romantic subjectivism was a position not chosen but inherited is a proposition with many defenders. Jacques Barzun noted in Classic, Romantic, and Modern (Chicago, 1943) that "it was neither caprice nor egotism that made many a work of romantic art subjective; it was the conditions of the search and the modesty of the searcher " (p. 69). Robert Langbaum has also argued that "it is an historical mistake to accuse the romanticists of subjectivism. It is to misunderstand the direction of romantic thought. For subjectivity was not the program but the inescapable condition of romanticism" (The Poetry of Experience, Norton, ©1957, p. 28). Cleanth Brooks, in a recanting essay that admits the essential unity of Romanticism and Modernism, recognizes the "great machine" of the "'Newtonian' universe" as the culprit in fostering this "moral and philosophical problem" of dualism that informed the whole poetics of Romanticism: "a true poem thus became in itself a kind of moral achievement and a way of bringing man back into a meaningful relation with his universe" ("A Retrospective Introduction" / 1965 / to Modern Poetry and the Tradition, 1939, rpt. 1965, Univ. of North Carolina Press, p. ix). Finally, W. Jackson Bate may be cited for his view that the Romantic recognition of the problem of subject-object relations and the desire to solve it, far from being a sign of weakness or indulgent egotism, is an heroic and hopeful sign: "to follow the development of this aspiration seems to me the most rewarding single episode in the history of ideas since the Renaissance" (The Burden of the Past and the English Poet, Norton, 1970, p. 125).

[66]Wasserman, p. 23.

[67]Wasserman, p. 25.

[68]John Keats, Letters of John Keats, ed. Robert Gittings (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 43.

[69]Wasserman, pp. 28-9.

[70]Wasserman, p. 29.

[71]Wasserman, p. 33.

[72]Wasserman, p. 33.

[73]Wasserman, p. 33. In addition to Peckham's claim about Wasserman's thesis that "these are perhaps the most important sentences ever written . . . on the theory of Romanticism" (see n. 54 above), other critics have developed similar positions. Jacques Barzun, noting the difficulty of assigning a variety of traits to all Romantic poets, has argued that "the error has consisted in supposing that what unites an age are common opinions and common traits" (Classic, Romantic, and Modern, pp. 13-14). Rather, he says, "the one thing that unites men in a given age is not their individual philosophies but the dominant problem that these philosophies are designed to solve. In the romantic period . . . this problem was to create a new world on the ruins of the old . . . the critical philosophers of the

eighteenth century had destroyed their own dwelling place" (p. 14). Raymond Williams traces the Romantic poet's concern with imagination to the economic circumstances created by the rise of industrialism, whereby isolated individuals in their roles as production units needed to be bound back together in a sense of common humanity by the poet's ability to bring relationship and love. Thus, Williams argues that "in England, these ideas that we call Romantic have to be understood in terms of the problems in experience with which they were advanced to deal" (Culture and Society: 1780-1950, 1958, Penguin, pp. 54, 59). Concerned with the development of poetic modes such as the dramatic monologue and myth, Robert Langbaum identifies the subject-object problem as the defining characteristic not only of Romanticism but of Modernism as well: "It was the romanticists with their new reconstructive purpose who, starting with an inherited split between object and value and wanting to heal the breach, saw objectivity as desirable and as difficult to achieve . . . / thus / once we grant that the return to objectivity is a purpose distinctive of the literature since the Enlightenment, then the poetry of the last one hundred and seventy-five years or so can be understood as belonging to a single developing tradition in which the romantic idea . . . is being perpetually realized" (The Poetry of Experience, Norton, 1957, pp. 29, 31). J. Hillis Miller, who opposes Langbaum's contention that Modernism shares the subject-object problem of Romanticism, agrees with him that Romanticism, at least, can be usefully viewed in terms of this problem (Poets of Reality, Harvard, 1966, pp. 1-2). Other critics accept Langbaum's thesis. John Bayley, arguing for the survival of Romantic ideas in the twentieth century, says that "it would be a reasonably safe generalization to say that the premises on which any romantic poem is written are an acute consciousness of the isolated creating self on the one hand, and of a world unrelated, and possibly uninterested and hostile, on the other" (The Romantic Survival, Constable, 1957, pp. 9-10). Even in the more recent handbooks of literary terms, the problem of subject-object relations and the role of imagination in resolving the problem are put forward as keys to the definition of Romanticism. Thus, in A Dictionary of Critical Terms (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) Gareth Griffiths summarizes what has been the argument of this chapter so far: "Whereas Lovejoy sees Romanticism as the general term for a range of related ideas, poetic, philosophic and social, his refuters would lay more stress on the characteristic images which haunt the romantic imagination. The central distinctive feature of the romantic mode is the search for a reconciliation between the inner vision and the outer experience expressed through "a creative power greater than his own because it includes his own" (Frye); or the synthetic imagination which performs this reconciliation and the vision it produces of a life drawing upon "a sense of continuity between man and nature and the presence of God" (Wellek) (p. 163).

[74]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 3.

[75]Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," in Romanticism Reconsidered, pp. 1, 24.

[76]Frye, "The Drunken Boat," p. 24.

[77]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 5.

[78]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," pp. 14, 16-17.

[79]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," pp. 17-18.

[80]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," pp. 37-8.

[81]J. J. Saunders, The Age of Revolution (London: Hutchinson, 1949); excerpts rpt. in Halstead, Romanticism, p. 7.

[82]Lovejoy, Chain, p. 307.

[83]T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in Speculations (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1924); rpt. in Romanticism: Points of View, eds. Robert Gleckner and Gerald Enscoe (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 36.

[84]Babbit, p. 17.

[85]Babbit, p. 161.

[86]Yvor Winters, In Defense of Reason (Chicago: Swallow, 1943), p. 8.

[87]Winters, In Defense of Reason, p. 453; Yvor Winters, The Function of Criticism (Chicago: Swallow, 1957), pp. 14, 63.

[88]T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. xi-xii.

[89]Eliot, pp. 157-58.

[90]Eliot, p. 58.

[91]Lilian Furst, Romanticism in Perspective (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 78.

[92]Furst, Perspective, pp. 84-99, passim.

[93]Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic, and Modern (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1943; 2nd ed. rev., 1961), p. 55; C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (1949; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 1.

[94]Wylie Sypher, Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 20.

[95]Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," The Yale Review, 58 (Summer, 1969), 526-36; rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 15, 17.

[96]M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 182.

[97]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 37.

[98]Furst, Perspective, p. 99.

[99]Hugh Fausset, Studies in Idealism (1923; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1965), p. xvii; Morse Peckham, "Aestheticism to Modernism: Fulfillment or Revolution?" Mundus Artium, 1 (Winter, 1967), 36-55; rpt. in The Triumph of Romanticism, p. 219.

[100]Frederick Garber, "Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero," Comparative Literature, 19 (Fall, 1967), 321-33; rpt. in The Hero in Literature, ed. Victor Brombert (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1969), pp. 213-14, 216.

[101]Garber, p. 226.

[102]George Boas, "The Romantic Self," Studies in Romanticism, 4 (Autumn, 1964), 15.

[103]Geoffrey Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'," Centennial Review, 6 (Autumn, 1962), 553-65; rev. and rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, pp. 54, 47-9.

[104]Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'," pp. 48-9.

[105]Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," p. 11.

[106]Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," p. 11.

[107]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 6.

[108]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 6.

[109]in Russell Noyes, ed., English Romantic Poetry and Prose (see n. 36), p. 327.

[110]Shelley, Shelley's Prose, p. 174.

[111]Peter Coveney, Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature (London: Rockliff, 1957) pp. 45-51.

[112]Lucas, pp. 109-10.

[113]Babbit, pp. 74, 51.

[114]Bernard Blackstone, The Lost Travellers: A Romantic Theme with Variations (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 14-42.

[115]Coveney, p. xi.

[116]Coveney, pp. 7-8.

[117]Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 1-2, 5.

[118]Coveney, pp. 41-42.

[119]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 33.

[120]C. J. Jung and C. Kerenyi, Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), pp. 97, 81.

[121]Bowra, p. 286.

[122]Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage, 1951), pp. 159-60.

[123]J. H. Van den Berg, "The Subject and his Landscape," from The Changing Nature of Man (Metabletica) (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 232; rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom, p. 62.

[124]M. H. Abrams, "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," The Kenyon Review, 19 (1957), 113-30; rev. and rpt. in English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, 2nd. ed., ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 37-54.

[125]Abrams, "The Correspondent Breeze," pp. 51-52.

[126]W. K. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery," from The Verbal Icon (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 103-116; rpt. in English Romantic Poets, ed. M. H. Abrams, pp. 25-36.

[127]Wimsatt, p. 30.

[128]Roger Shattuck, "This Must Be the Place: Wordsworth to Proust," in Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities, eds. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Itaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 179, 181.

[129]Shattuck, p. 187.

[130]Geoffrey Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," in Beyond Formalism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 222-23.

[131]M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle, eds. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965); rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom, pp. 201-29.

[132]George Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976).

[133]Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," p. 218.

[134]Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," p. 201.

[135]M. H. Abrams et al., eds., The Norton Anthology of English Literature, II, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 219.

[136]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp. 143-69.

[137]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 144.

[138]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 255.

[139]S. T. Coleridge, Poetical Works, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), p. 209.

[140]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 295.

[141]William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 585-86.

[142]quoted in Natural Supernaturalism, pp. 295-97.

[143]Keats, Letters, pp. 36-37.

[144]Shelley, Shelley's Prose, pp. 282-83.

[145]Shelley, Shelley's Prose, p. 170.

[146]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 4; Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 298.

[147]Frederick Beaty, Light from Heaven: Love in British Romantic Literature (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971), pp. xix-xx.

[148]R. A. Foakes, The Romantic Assertion: A Study in the Language of Nineteenth-Century Poetry (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 111.

[149]Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," p. 24.

[150]Harold Bloom, "Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus," in The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 127.

[151]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," pp. 6, 18.

[152]Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), chs. I, IV, passim.

[153]Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (1957; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1964), ch. IV.

[154]Frye, "The Drunken Boat," pp. 20-21.

[155]Beaty, p. xvi.

[156]J. H. Van den Berg, "The Subject and his Landscape," p. 58; Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), rev. and enlarg., 1971), p. xvii.

[157]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 121; Keats, Letters, p. 390.

[158]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 68.

[159]Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'," p. 52.

[160]Robert Langbaum, Modern Spirit: Essays on the Continuity of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 5-6; Furst, Perspective, p. 179.

[161]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 385f.

[162]Peckham, "Toward A Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations," pp. 32-33.

[163]Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," trans. Paul de Man, printed in Revue internationale de Philosophie, 51 (1960), 68-84 as "Structure intentionelle de l'image romantique"; rpt. in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom, pp. 67-68, 70.

[164]Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 701.

[165]S. T. Coleridge, Unpublished Letters of S. T. Coleridge, ed. E. L. Grigg (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), as quoted in Margaret Anne Hardesty, "An Examination of the Sacramental Vision of Dylan Thomas . . ." Diss. State Univ. of New York at Binghamton 1974, p. 88.

[166]Furst, Perspective, p. 185; Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., The Modern Tradition (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 47.

[167]Northrop Frye, "The Realistic Oriole: A Study of Wallace Stevens," in Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), pp. 240, 251.

[168]Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. S. Langer (New York: Harper, 1946), p. 3.

[169]M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953; rpt. New York: 1958), pp. 272-85.

[170]Robert F. Gleckner, "Romanticism and the Self-Annihilation of Language," Criticism, 18 (Spring, 1976), p. 184.

[171]Hulme, pp. 36-37.

[172]A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Imagination," in Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 370-75.

[173]Bowra, pp. 1, 13.

[174]The Modern Tradition, pp. 54-56.

[175]Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 113.

[176]Bowra, pp. 17-19.

[177]Shelley, Shelley's Prose, pp. 276-83.

[178]Bowra, pp. 15-16.

[179]Bowra, pp. 149, 153; Furst, Perspective, p. 199.

[180]Barzun, p. 11.

[181]W. Jackson Bate, The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 126, 127.

[182]Peckham, "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory," p. 78.

[183]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 20.

[184]Furst, Perspective, p. 131; Shelley, Shelley's Prose, p. 291; The Modern Tradition, p. 55.

[185]Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 171-4, 222, 169.

[186]M. H. Abrams, "The Romantic Period," in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, II, p. 7.

CHAPTER III

ROMANTICISM, MODERNISM, AND THE POETICS OF DYLAN THOMAS

Many definitions of Modernism are dominated by the sense of the estrangement of the self, both from nature and from the cultural past. This very self-consciousness of separation may have caused some of the Moderns themselves to provide, early on, the crucial dates that heralded the beginning of a new cultural era. In the Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936), Yeats offered Pater's impressionistic prose meditation "La Gioconda" as the first Modernist poem, and he chose 1900 as the fin of the fin de siecle: "then in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church; or if they did I have forgotten." Virginia Woolf placed the crucial date slightly later in her remark that "on or about December, 1910, human nature changed." Another popular date is that of the formation of the Poet's Club in Soho, 1908-09, where T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, and others introduced Ezra Pound to the doctrine of Imagism whose greatest prophet he would become.[1] Other dates abound. Monroe K. Spears picks 1870 as a key year in the downfall of liberal Christian humanism; John Hollander chooses 1899 on the basis of the appearance of Arthur Symons's The Symbolist Movement in Literature which introduced T. S. Eliot to the French poets who would be so influential in formulating his metaphysical-symbolist technique of ironic juxtaposition, arcane allusion, and Romantic

irony. Ellmann and Feidelson, in their extensive compendium of Modernist statements on nature, art, self, consciousness, history, and religion locate many roots of Modernism in the ideas of Kant, Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth.[2] Others, including Eliot and Yeats, push the dates back into the seventeenth century, when rationalism separated thought and feeling, man and nature. In the case of the anti-Romantic Eliot, there is some irony in the fact that many current Romantic scholars, as was shown in Chapter II, trace the Romantic "dissociation of sensibility" to the same time period. Yeats's statement, however, makes it clear that for him the Romantics and the Moderns share the central problem of estrangement and subsequent self-consciousness for which the phrase "the problem of subject-object relations" has been adopted. Yeats said, "when my generation denounced scientific humanitarian pre-occupation, psychological curiosity, rhetoric, we had not found what ailed Victorian literature . . . the mischief began at the end of the seventeenth century when man became passive before a mechanized nature; that lasted till our own day with the exception of a brief period between Smart's Song to David and the death of Byron, wherein imprisoned man beat upon the door."[3] This period, of course, is the High Romantic period in British literature. In a late broadcast, "Modern Poetry" (1936), Yeats accurately recognizes that even Eliot's poetic revolution was "stylistic alone," for the tortures of estranging self-consciousness dominate Prufrock, Gerontion, and The Waste Land.[4]

Whatever terminus a quo one may choose for Modernism, its relationship to Romanticism is crucial both for those who see it as a violent rejection of Romantic values and for those who see it as the final phase of a single movement that includes both periods. The estrangement of the self is a vital trait in either case. Thus Harold Bloom, looking forward from the

Romantic period, says that "Wordsworth was the inventor of modern poetry, and he found no subject but himself"; thus, Bloom concludes, "our poets were and are Romantic as poets used to be Christian, that is, whether they want to be or not." Conversely, looking backward, Lionel Trilling says that "the modern period had its beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth century and its apogee in the first quarter of the twentieth century." Trilling, like Bloom, isolated the desire to escape self-consciousness as a key trait of this meta-period: "the idea of losing oneself up to the point of self-destruction, of surrendering oneself to experience without regard to self-interest or conventional morality, of escaping wholly from the societal bonds, is an 'element' somewhere in the mind of every modern person who dares to think of what Arnold . . . called 'the fulness of spiritual perfection'."[5] Still, in the many analyses of the literature of 1783-1950, most critics recognize an increasing sense that artistic and cultural problems require ever more radical solutions or else the abandonment of the hope of solution in favor of resignation or despair. Faith in the Romantic notions of the healing power of imagination, love, or an inspirited nature is commonly abandoned for the "lower" powers of fancy or wit, rationality, sex, and a primitivist nature of purely physical vitalism. The Romantic problem of the isolated self, however, remains central, as can be seen in any list of common traits ascribed to Modernist poets. Such characteristics often include the following: a condemnation of modern society and a sense of cultural decline, the abandonment of the idea of objective order, a belief in the self as the focal point of interest and a subject for exploration, a fascination with cultural primitivism and atavistic mental states arising from the unconscious, the presentation of characters or personae who are self-divided and searching for unity of being within and

without, a sense of the power of the irrational over the rational mind, a feeling that man is isolated in an urban and technological culture both from that culture and from nature itself, a belief in the autonomy of art into which the self may escape, or conversely, a sense of nihilism that denies tragedy, the transcendental, culture, or art itself. Since the self is isolated it must resort to private symbols, though it may seek to conceal itself in mask, persona, myth, or an objective correlative. Primitive myths or archetypal symbols of the collective unconscious as presented in the works of Frazer, Freud, and Jung provide ambiguous solutions to the self which seems to be given only the choices of death-in-life (self-consciousness) or life-in-death (submergence in the primitive, the unconscious). Ortega Y Gasset argues that the burden of self-consciousness causes Modern art to be first elitist, escapist, anti-traditional, and then, as a result, finally inconsequential, self-destroying, dehumanized.[6] Freud, in Civilization and Its Discontents, extends this dialectic between increasing self-consciousness and the desire for self-oblivion to civilization itself, the ongoing battle between the instincts of Eros (sublimed and moralized into super-ego) and Death determining the outcome.[7] Civilization is fostered and sustained by a potentially lethal burden of guilt. Another kind of guilt that haunts the Modern self is what W. Jackson Bate calls "the burden of the past" and Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence." The Modern artist becomes increasingly aware of the fantastic weight of three thousand years of Western culture, an awareness that Bloom calls the sense of "belatedness":

> The poet of any guilt culture whatsoever cannot initiate himself into a fresh chaos; he is compelled to accept a lack of priority in creation, which means he must first accept also a failure in divination, as the first of many little deaths

> that prophesy a final and total extinction. His word is not his own word only, and his Muse has whored with many before him. He has come late in the story, but she has always been central in it, and he rightly fears that his impending catastrophe is only another in her litany of sorrows.[8]

Bate, also, links the Romantics and Moderns in a common desire to do original work: "the one thing they all have in common is an interest or hope in the hitherto unexploited. And despite the strong attraction of twentieth-century post-romantic formalism to ideals of retrenchment and self-limitation, that still remains with us as a premise with which we are disinclined to quarrel."[9] But the very pressure of what Bloom calls "the terrible splendor of cultural heritage" presents the poet with various "titanic" figures such as Milton or Wordsworth who become Freudian fathers that the poet must meet and try to "defeat" -- an almost impossible task -- in order to assert his own priority and to attain imaginative autonomy through self-begetting.

The implication of the position of Bate and Bloom is that Modernism is both the final form of what began with High Romanticism and also an impasse of despair beyond which it is difficult if not impossible to go. Irving Howe makes this point in The Idea of the Modern when he traces the development of Modernism out of Romanticism in terms of the increasing isolation of the self from any permanent source of value. Although, like the Moderns, the Romantics posit the self as the center of the search for value, they go beyond the more extreme Moderns in still believing in a transcendental order that can be perceived within and/or beyond the natural world whose forms are signs and symbols of that larger realm. In Modern writers, Howe argues, the objective world keeps wanting to slip completely inside the subjective self which in turn sickens of its own subjectivity. The disappearance of the transcendental dimension and the

self's abandonment of the search for value in the external world define the ultimate Modern view as nihilistic: there is no inherent meaning in human existence.[10] Critics differ in their attitudes toward Howe's formulation, seeing the movement toward nihilism as freedom, restriction, or an interim phase beyond which lie the obscure ranges of "post-modernism." Robert Langbaum sees Romanticism as Modernism, "a single developing tradition," concerned with "the return to objectivity" but recognizing a radical subjectivity that cannot be subverted:

> The question even arises whether in the post-Enlightenment world, in a scientific and democratic age, literature, whatever its program, can be anything but romantic in the sense I mean. Are not, after all, even our new classicisms and new Christian dogmatisms really romanticisms in an age which simply cannot supply the world-views such doctrines depend on, so that they become, for all their claims or objectivity, merely another opinion, the objectification of somebody's personal view?[11]

More ecstatically, Morse Peckham notes that the Nietzschean discovery that the search for the ground of value was itself the primary illusion cleared the way for the final resolution of the Romantic problem of the terms of the self's "re-entry" into society and nature. The ultimate answer lies in "the transvaluation of all values and in the continuous transvaluation." Once it was discovered that "the world was quite meaningless, quite without value, in both Subject and Object -- for Subject and Object are one -- then sorrow could be converted to joy," the joy of continuous creation and decreation of value. This "continuous self-transformation and renewal of Self," Peckham concludes, which is "the distinguishing mark of the twentieth-century artist . . . is the triumph of Romanticism."[12] Not a "triumph" but "the end of the line" is the metaphor Randall Jarrell uses to describe Modernism as the final phase of Romanticism. The Romantic emphasis on experimentalism, originality, and self-

expression, Jarrell argues, led inevitably to the most extreme Modernist explorations of the irrational, the primitive, the anarchic, and the sensational. Even the rejection of earlier Romantic poetry by the Modernists such as Eliot was only a final fulfillment of Romantic subjectivism, as outlined above by Langbaum and Peckham. Finally, says Jarrell, Romanticism is confronted with a conundrum: to remain Romantic it must give up what was Romantic in the past or else harden into a new absolutism, the absolutism of repetitive yet ceaseless change:

> . . . at last, romanticism is confronted with an impasse, a critical point, a genuinely novel situation that it can meet successfully only by contriving genuinely novel means -- that is, means which are not romantic; the romantic means have already been exhausted. Until these new means are found, romanticism operates by repeating its last modernist successes or by reverting to its earlier stages; but its normal development has ended, and -- the momentum that gave it most of its attraction gone -- it becomes a relatively eclectic system, much closer to neo-classicism than it has hitherto been.[13]

Going beyond Jarrell, J. Hillis Miller sees Modernism not as the final exfoliation of Romantic tendencies but as the rejection of the Romantic problem of "subject" and "object." Miller argues that Modernism is as profound a change from Romantic poetry as Romantic poetry was from the poetry of the Enlightenment. Miller agrees with the critics in Chapter II who see Romanticism as a "double bifurcation" into natural and supernatural realms in the cosmos, subjective and objective realms in perception. The goal of the Romantic poet is to forge a union of these realms by creating "the romantic image" which may marry subject to object or subsume either one into the other. Even in the more pessimistic Victorian poets, he argues, as the supernatural withdrew itself from immanence in the natural world, a sort of vast emptiness remained, a sense of depth, so that the possibility for return remained real. Arnold, it could be

said, saw it as his duty to keep the void open for the return of God. A fully Modernist poet is one for whom that void, that sense of dimension, has collapsed into nihilism so that the deity and the universe become nothing more than perceptions of the self. Thus defined, nihilism is "the nothingness of consciousness when consciousness becomes the foundation of everything." Such nihilism, however, is only a via negativa toward a new sense of reality; nihilism, in fact, can be "transcended."[14] This happens when the self realizes the Kurtzian "horror" of a sinister spiritual power in a universe for which man is not responsible and which he cannot control. Shocked by the vast malevolence at the heart of darkness, the self gives up its Romantic cravings to control the object and learns that "the mind must efface itself before reality, dispersing itself in a milieu which exceeds it and which it has not made . . . abandoning the will to power over things." Thus reduced and freed of its Romantic burden, the self will find that the sense of depth is replaced by the sense of surfaces, the sense of a quest for a goal replaced by the sense of an ongoing present which contains God only as an "immanent presence" or "fugitive presence" which is "being" itself, the common component of all phenomena.[15] The self can lose itself in a world it need no longer feel obliged to try to control. Rather, there is a sort of dark conversion in which the sinner self first experiences the grace of cosmic abnegation. Such an argument as Miller's is difficult to attack without recourse to the close examination of individual poems. However it may be said that Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, and Dylan Thomas all confront the problem of subject and object and all admit the possibility of the existence of a transcendental realm. Also, Miller's belief that the phase of nihilism gives way to a new realm in which spiritual powers may be "immanent" only means that

the poets who enter this realm have solved one of the two Romantic bifurcations, that of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. If the categories of subject and object are lost in the endless flux of the continuous present of surface phenomena, then the question of the poet's presentation of this state of affairs arises. If this state is accepted, the poet may be post-Romantic by Miller's definition; but if the poet mourns this new reduction as a further "fall," then he may still be Romantic in his values. In an odd sort of way, the post-nihilist state of "reality" that Miller describes could as easily as not be the Romantic paradise. Miller does not explain why he retains the term "surface" to describe this reality when other dualisms have collapsed. Why this post-dualist reality could not as easily be that of Blake as of Conrad he does not say. As various critics have noted, there is a curious insubstantiality to Miller's argument, even when he is discussing particular poems, that leads him to ignore poetic form and devices inherited from the Romantics by the Moderns.[16]

Before turning to those critics who pursue the relationship between Romanticism and Modernism from perspectives other than Miller's phenomenological one, one may examine a more representative example of the literary critic who questions the significant relationship between the two periods. Monroe K. Spears in Dionysus and the City: modernism in twentieth-century poetry (1970) offers one of the most intelligent rebuttals to critics who support the idea of important continuity between Romantic and Modern Poetry. Spears builds his case for the independence of Modernism from Romantic values on the idea of "discontinuity" between Modernism and its own cultural past. Building on a remark by T. E. Hulme that the nineteenth century sought continuity in all phases of its cultural life while Modernists emphasize discontinuity, Spears outlines

four central modes of discontinuity: (1) metaphysical (body/spirit, ethics/religion, organic/inorganic), (2) aesthetic (a rejection of autonomy), (3) rhetorical (alogical, discontinuous structure), and (4) temporal (the spacialization of time).[17] Spears adopts the idea of a primeval "fall" (but without a pre-existent Eden) that has continued its endless decline into the present as the only continuity of significance. The crucial date for the beginning of Modernism, arbitrary but symbolic, is 1870, when various international events signaled "the beginning of the end of liberal Christian humanism." In terms of purely artistic achievement, the years 1907-10 are a key period, a time which saw important developments in the work of Picasso, Schonberg, Eliot, Pound, and Joyce. To describe these developments, Spears makes use of the Nietzschean distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian values. Control, moderation, self-knowledge, and the sense of individuation dominate the Apollonian perspective and characterize (for Spears) the English Enlightenment and Victorian periods. In designating the Elizabethans, Romantics, and Moderns as Dionysian, Spears defines his symbol for Modernism: ". . . in Dionysian rapture and awe walls are broken down and the bonds between man and man and between man and nature are re-forged . . . he /Dionysus/ represents the claims of the collective, the irrational and emotional and abnormal; of the feminine or androgynous or perverse; of intoxication and possession, surrender to non-human forces; even of disease."[18] Modern revulsion over urbanization, industrialism, and technology makes the city the unavoidably central ground for Dionysian eruption and psychic projection of inner states of mind, a reversal of the Romantic preference for landscape. Significantly, Spears concludes his historical survey of the origins of Modernism with the observation that by the 1950's many writers such as

Robert Graves, Karl Shapiro, and Graham Hough detected the emergence of "Neo-Romanticism" out of the British Apocalypse group, Neo-Romantics, and the American "confessional" school whose greatest convert was Robert Lowell.[19] In spite of the fact that he takes up a position in conscious opposition to critics such as Kermode and Bloom who emphasize the vital continuity of Romanticism and Modernism, Spears provides some useful evidence for the theses of such opponents. First of all, Spears admits that both the Romantics and the Moderns are Dionysian, and his description of Dionysianism seems to support the view that the desire to escape the burden of self-consciousness is a crucial trait shared by Romantic and Modern poets. Second, Spears' list of Modern "discontinuities" is in no essential way anti-Romantic. What Spears calls "metaphysical discontinuity" is easily recognized as the Romantic problem of various dualisms, of which subject-object relations is a central instance. In fact, Spears seems in direct support of Romantic theorists in his description of subject-object relations as a "Modern" problem: "in all realms a new recognition of subjectivity, an awareness of the complex and inescapable relation between inner and outer, observer and observed, is apparent." Quoting Baudelaire's definition of "'the modern conception of Art'" as the desire to "'create a suggestive magic including at the same time object and subject, the world outside the artist and the artist himself'," Spears illuminates the important connection between a Romantic problem, Symbolist technique, and Modernist practice.[20] Furthermore, the Modernist poet's often ambiguous attitude toward "aesthetic discontinuity," a desire to accept the poem as heterocosm or else reject it for a poetry of immediate experience -- Byzantium or the rag-and-bone shop of the heart -- is a direct inheritance from Romantic poetic theory and poems such as Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The

category of "rhetorical discontinuity" does seem more centrally Modern than Romantic, yet Spears himself points out that critical theorists (Brooks, for one) have traced the development of alogical juxtaposition to both Keats and Wordsworth. The final discontinuity, "temporal discontinuity," or the rejection of simple narrational chronology for a series of simultaneously present moments, is also continuous with the Romantic and Aesthetic "moment" of special insight, a continuity already documented by M. H. Abrams in Natural Supernaturalism.[21] The New Critical emphasis on autonomy and organicism, the Modern rejection of inherited poetic diction for the cadences of the speaking voice (cf. Wordsworth's poet as "a man speaking to men"), and the emergence of Modern apocalyptism in face of a destructive isolation are also traits located by Spears which have Romantic roots. When Spears, speaking of Modern apocalyptism, comments that "the moderns were led by their overwhelming sense of crisis to an attitude that must be called religious, in the sense of intensely personal concern with some form of salvation," one can only remark that such displacement of religious experience and concerns into secular forms, as noted in Chapter II, is one of the most prominent traits among English Romantics. Thus, Spears is right in saying at the last that "the relation between modernism and Romanticism is remarkably difficult to state properly," and he is also right in proposing that "the most useful discussion in such terms [Romanticism, Modernism] is likely to be that which discriminates among the various ways in which particular moderns are and are not related to specific romantic traditions."[22] Before offering Dylan Thomas as an example of the critical process that Spears recommends, it may be helpful to turn to some critics who see the continuity between Romanticism and Modernism as both more self-evident and less problematic than critics such as Spears.

Critics who consider Modernism as a continuing exfoliation of the tendencies that first assumed importance in the High Romantic period range from those who see Modernism as the fulfillment of Romantic goals to those who see Modernism as a movement that faces Romantic problems but which does so without corresponding Romantic faith in imagination and the high destiny of man. Many critics recognize Ernest Bernbaum's assertion that a chief characteristic of Modernism is its inability simply to ignore Romantic values; rather, the Romantic achievement must be praised and augmented or condemned and subverted.[23] Hugh Fausset, weighing the Modern choice less equally, calls the early anti-Romantic phase of Modernism a "temporary reaction" against a movement whose wide humanitarianism is too important to us to be rejected:

> Indeed, we may say that above the small fluctuations of fashion we cannot henceforth be ever again anything but romantic in spirit, and demand the same infinite aspiration, the same faith in evolutionary betterment, the same universal humanity of our poets, as was voiced amid much hasty error at the beginning of the last century. Romanticism has enlarged man's consciousness for good. We can never return to a poetry based upon narrow and privileged sympathies. Only at present we are above all anxious that our Romanticism should be true. . .[24]

In a slightly narrower context, Morse Peckham's view of the development of the idea of the self from the Romantics through the Aesthetics to the Moderns parallels Fausset's more broadly cultural view of increasing freedom and progressivism. In "Aestheticism to Modernism: Fulfillment or Revolution?" Peckham argues that the answer to the problem of subject-object relations was neither the collapse of subject into object (the Enlightenment) or the collapse of object into subject (Blake) but an eternally unresolved, vital tension between the two categories. The vital force in this energized polarity, says Peckham, was the Aesthetics' discovery that the self could be continually reinvented, "self-transforma-

tion by self-transcendence," which is the essence of Modernism.[25] Less exultant than Fausset or Peckham about the pervasiveness of Romantic ideas in contemporary society, Peter Conrad has argued that, far from giving to man a new freedom for endless transformation, Romanticism has hardened into a totalitarianism of the irrational:

> In a sense twentieth-century culture has been a prolonged, perplexed inquest into Romanticism, at one level officially disowning it, at another democratizing it in drugs, magic, astrology, self-exploratory suicide and the overtaking of culture by pop music, which recreates electrically in Sterne's vibrant sensorium of the world. Though we are the last romantics, it is also true that we are all romantics now. Romanticism has successfully universalized itself, with the aid of affluent technology -- what began at the end of the eighteenth century as a new sense of human individualism has now turned against that individuality, coaxing it into visionary delirium or inciting it to communal hysteria. The peculiar and painful sense of exclusion and ironic self-division of Byron and Holderlin has become the spiritual uniform of every undergraduate; impassioned radicalism has likewise become obligatory and in so extending itself lost its integrity and became a violent defense of privilege.[26]

A more popular view than that of Bernbaum, Fausset, Peckham, and Conrad that Modernism is a terrible fulfillment of Romantic hopes or fears is the view that Modernism is a kind of Romanticism _in extremis_, plagued by similar problems but with reduced powers to exercise against them. R. A. Foakes remarks in _The Romantic Assertion_ that although both the Romantics and the Moderns experienced estrangement from inherited values, the Romantics alone were able to create order out of the self's relation to the natural world. The Modern poet, on the other hand, is plagued by an ineradicable sense of tentativeness in his assertions, which must be couched in irony, ambiguity, or a retreat into orthodoxy (Eliot) or vitalistic rage (the later Yeats). Significantly, Foakes excepts a single Modern poet from the entrapment of Modernism: "those modern poets

like Dylan Thomas who have made a vigorous assertion do not reflect the dominant tone of the present time."[27] Geoffrey Hartman notes in similar fashion that the Modernist agony of self-consciousness is made the worse for our knowledge that Romantic solutions are unavailable to us, the result being that "the contemporary situation differs from that of the Romantics only in its apparent irreversibility and uncompromising nature."[28] Accepting Hartman's view that the great Modernist poets (Pound, Eliot, Crane, Yeats) were "rebels within Romanticism," John Bayley in The Romantic Survival argues that the Herculean task of the Modern imagination was to absorb into an organic whole a vast range of phenomena such as the machinery of industrialism, which is more difficult to relate to the self's deepest concerns than Romantic landscapes. Of Hart Crane's attempts to transform the bric-a-brac of contemporary life into poetry, Bayley writes that his "feverish brilliancy of language lapses frequently into the merely chaotic, and the reader is uneasily aware of an ideal that hangs unattained before the poet and urges him on to still further futile displays of energy." The ugliness of industrialism and the pervasiveness of bourgeoisie commercialism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the terrors of the unconscious mind, have made the imagination's task of "annexation" increasingly difficult. Yet Bayley remains firm in his conviction that the Modernist poet should persist in the Romantic strategy of transforming all experience into the categories of imaginative value. As an example of a Modern poet who attempts to follow Romantic strategy, Bayley singles out Dylan Thomas for his illumination of the residual consciousness of the body and the unconscious mind. Thus, for Bayley, as for Foakes, Thomas displays "the absorption and single-mindedness of the great Romantics."[29] The difficulty of the Modernist in attaining single-

mindedness of purpose characterizes M. H. Abrams' studies of the relationship between Romanticism and Modernism. Abrams, like Bernbaum, accepts the view that important Modern writers "have defined their own literary enterprise by either a positive or a negative reference to the forms and inherent ethos of the Romantic achievement" and that their "works that we think of as distinctly modern continue to embody Romantic innovations in ideas and design, although often within a drastically altered perspective on man and nature and human life."[30] In his two major studies of Romanticism, The Mirror and the Lamp and Natural Supernaturalism, Abrams has demonstrated that the Modern poet has inherited the Romantic concepts of the poem as heterocosm, the organic theory of poetic creation, the infinite moment, the Romantic image, the isolated artist, the poem as a combination of opposites and incongruities, and the poetic forms of the greater Romantic lyric and the poem as a spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet. However, these manifold affinities between the poets of the two periods do not, in Abram's view, make up for the central distinction that the Romantics were affirming humanists, believers in the ultimate triumph of the religious values of faith, hope, and love as these operated in a secular context. They sought their own redemption and were unwilling to give up hope of salvaging the central values of Western tradition from the breakdown of the rationalist world-view. Unlike their despairing Modernist brothers, Abrams argues, the Romantics believed that "the norm of life is joy . . . /it is/ the sign that an individual, in the free exercise of all his faculties is completely alive; it is the necessary condition for a full community of life and love; and it is both the precondition and the end of the highest art."[31] In an infrequently-cited-but-informative essay, "Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Modernist Poetics" (1966), Abrams links these Romantic

affirmations to the Romantic problem of subject-object relations, a problem solved by the expression of "love" as a healing force, not in the retreat of the poet into the sterile artifice of the poem as is the case with some post-Romantic poets. For the Romantic poet, unlike his Modernist counterpart, the poem is a record of imaginative process in nature and imagination, and the poet's duty is to foster the relationship of love between men. The concept of the poet as withdrawn, apolitically reactionary, elitist creator of "pure," anti-natural, autotelic art is foreign, says Abrams, to the deepest instincts of Romanticism.[32] Abrams' formulation of the problem of the relationship between Romanticism and Modernism raises the question as to which is more central, the Modern inheritance of the problem of subject-object relations or the Modernist disinclination toward expansive assertion and affirmation. As noted above, R. A. Foakes also detects the absence of Romantic "assertion" in Modern literature, exempting Dylan Thomas from his general indictment; but as to Abrams' characterization of Romantic positives there is less agreement. L. J. Swingle, in his essay "Romantic Unity and English Romantic Poetry," directly attacks Abrams' belief that a sense of unity rather than disunity, coalescence rather than separation, is the deepest Romantic intuition. Swingle demonstrates that Abrams' sense of Romantic affirmation more clearly reflects Romantic statements on poetics than it reflects Romantic poetry, a poetry less uniformly joyous, hopeful, or loving than Abrams' emphases would lead one to expect.[33] In fact, as Harold Bloom frequently points out, it may be the very extensiveness of Romantic claims for the goodness of life and the salvation of man that invites a concomitant despair over the difficulty of realizing these aims, a despair that becomes increasingly acute in the Modern period. Bloom

makes one of the broadest claims for the ongoing Romantic nature of Modernism, saying at one point that "our poets were are Romantic as poets used to be Christian, that is, whether they want to be or not." Bloom does, however, distinguish rightly between Romanticism as a timeless phenomenon as well as a recurrent one from the Victorians through the Moderns. Consequently, the "most vital modern poetry" is for Bloom Romantic, even if its makers are self-proclaimed anti-Romantics, because "we are, all of us, largely involuntary Romantics, however intensely we proclaim our overt beliefs to be anti-Romantic."[34] Yet if Modern poets are or must be Romantic, they are Romantics reduced in power. Bloom even claims that in one sense the Romantics are closer to the poets of the Enlightenment than they are to the Moderns: for both Neo-classicists and Romantics believed, says Bloom, "in the power of the mind over the universe of sense. All believed that the poet's mind could make, or be found by, a coherent order in history or nature or society, or some combination thereof. None of them beheld a vision of chaos without believing also that chaos was irrational, and capable therefore of being organized into an intellectual coherence."[35] What does connect Romantics and Moderns, says Bloom, is the belief that the problem of estrangement cannot be solved by the exercise of reason alone, although the faith in imagination is generally stronger among the High Romantics. Remarking that the "lack is not energy of apprehension, but rather the active force of a synthesizing imagination," Bloom gloomily concludes that "if there <u>is</u> a division between the major Romantics and their most remarkable modern followers . . . then that division falls against the Romantic moderns."[36] Yet Bloom constantly emphasizes the problem of subject-object relations as a connecting link between the poets of the two periods. All Moderns are "miserable dualists,"

afflicted by the disease of self-consciousness, and, like the Romantics before them, these poets must resolve the division between natural and supernatural in one fashion or the other:

> The burden of Romantic poetry, and the true though frequently evaded burden of post-Romantic poetry, is either to offer an apocalypse of the order of physical reality, as in Blake or Shelley or Yeats, or to move us toward that adventure in humanity in which, at last, we would be a race completely physical in a physical world, the dream of Keats and of the colder Stevens after him. Between these fierce alternatives there is the blending vision of Wordsworth, seeking the difficult rightness of a nature "first and last and midst and without end," in which the Characters of the Great Apocalypse could be read in every countenance and on every blossom.[37]

Although poets of both periods share the form of internalized quest-romance, concern with the isolation of the self from nature, and the experience of the infinite moment, it is the Moderns, Bloom feels, who accept reduction and chaos as the faith in the redemptive power of the imagination subsides. A problem is shared but not the key to its solution; nevertheless, this is enough, for Bloom, to place the major Modernist poets squarely in the Romantic tradition.

Studies such as those by Abrams, Langbaum, and Bloom are all part of a revisionist movement by contemporary critics who, somewhat belatedly, undertook to correct the devaluation of Romantic poetry by early Modernist poets and critics such as Hulme, Pound, Eliot, and Leavis. What many such revisionists discovered was that much of the poetical theory and practice of the Modern poets themselves was unconsciously Romantic. However, one of the earliest of the Modern critics to argue this point was not a Romantic scholar but a confirmed anti-Romantic: the poet and critic Yvor Winters. Even Bloom, who agrees with Winters on little else, agrees with him that much of the important poetry in English and American literature

of the last 150 years has been in the Romantic tradition. In his essay "The Central Man: Emerson, Whitman, Wallace Stevens," Bloom praises Winters for seeing these poets (plus Hart Crane) as "a continuous tradition" and for declaring "that almost all poetry written in English since the age of sensibility . . . was inescapably Romantic, whatever its contrary desires."[38] That both Bloom and Winters, polar opposites in their evaluations of the worth of Romantic values, should coincide in the judgment of Modernism as a phase of Romanticism is extremely significant.

Winters recognizes four main theories of literature in the Western tradition: the didactic, the hedonistic, the Romantic, and the moralistic.[39] The didactic theory of literature is based on the idea that in evaluation the precept or paraphrasable content of a work of art is primary, whereas aesthetic effects are secondary, commendable only in the Horatian sense that to delight while instructing may assure the success of the instruction. Winters' objections to this theory are that for such purposes ethics or religion seem better modes of instruction than art and that the effect on us of a great work of art is in excess of a simplistic paraphrase of whatever didactic instructions it may contain. In essence, didactic poetry is a less sophisticated version of Winters' own position as a moralistic poet. The second theory of literature is the hedonistic. According to Winters, the hedonistic theory may take the form of the search for pleasure as the primary effect of literature or may tend toward the doctrine of autotelic art (Eliot). The faults in the hedonistic position are that pleasure is not viewed as a by-product of rational thought, that there is no ethical standard to discriminate one kind of pleasure from another, that hedonism is intellectually if not morally corrupting, and that the doctrine of autotelic art not only prevents a rational discussion of the values inherent in the poem but also denies any

necessary connection of the values inherent in the poem and human conduct outside the poem. The third theory of literature in the order of Winters' presentation is the Romantic one, but for the purposes of this discussion it will be better to consider first the theory to which Winters himself subscribes: the moralistic theory of literature. According to this theory, a poem is "a statement in words about a human experience." Its structure is basically rational, for words are primarily conceptual, and although emotive connotations inevitably adhere to these words, they should be strictly controlled by the poet and subordinated to the governing, logically developed, central idea of the poem. A good poem contains a "defensible rational statement" that should arouse in the reader only those emotions appropriate to the rational comprehension of the central idea of the poem. This theory does not imply that a great poem must be composed purely of abstract statements, although it could be; rather it requires that all description, images, metaphors, and symbols be subservient to a ruling concept which is clearly stated or embodied in the poem. Some of the very greatest poems, Winters believes, may be defined as "post-Symbolist," that is, poems in which the concrete details are simultaneously precise descriptions of phenomena and precise substitutes for abstractions in the rational development of the intellectual argument of the poem.[40] Such poems are considered judgments of human experiences, and since moral judgments imply the existence of some standard of objective truth, Winters concludes that the moralistic poet must adopt an absolutist, theistic position, out of logical necessity. Winters considers the composition of a great poem one of the highest achievements of the human intellect, a vital act that contributes to civilization, the painfully achieved product of reason. Conversely, the composition of poems according to principles that demote

or reject reason as the central source of poetic structure is a vicious act, corruptive of the single mind and of general cultural standards. Winters' high seriousness concerning the importance of poetry and reason explains his attitude toward the third of his four theories of literature, the Romantic.

Winters considers the Romantic theory of literature both powerful and evil. More than the didactic or hedonistic theory, the Romantic theory exalts the status of poetry and recognizes it as a profoundly significant influence on human life. However, the Romantic theory is filled with crucial errors both about literature and about the nature of man. These errors include the belief that literature is essentially self-expression, that man should surrender to impulse or instinct and thus become an automaton, that the reason is a fallacious guide to poetic composition and to life, that man is essentially good, that spontaneity is a virtue in composing a poem, that a mystical pantheism is a viable path to God, and that the irrational should be cultivated as a path to truth. In addition to these sins, says Winters, the Romantic is inescapably relativistic and deterministic because of his rejection of reason for the automatism of impulse, "sincerity," and emotional spontaneity. The primary fault of the Romantic poet seems to be that he displays intense emotion in a poem without providing that all-important prior rational understanding and moral evaluation of a particular human experience that is the justifying motive for the presence of emotion in the poem. In other words, the Romantic is a sentimentalist. The Coleridgean doctrine of organic form thus seems to Winters simply another way of condoning unrestrained self-expression, for such a doctrine implies that form should be expressive of content, a belief that Winters connects to the contemporary doctrine of "imitative form" such as Eliot's notion of the

objective correlative which informs The Waste Land.[41] Winters is emphatic in his view that Romanticism is a clear and present danger in poetic theory and practice today. He speaks not only of the "modern orthodoxy of Romanticism" but claims that "the Romantic theory of literature and of human nature has been the dominant theory in western civilization for about two and a half centuries."[42] Winters has discussed the origins of Romantic theory in "The Sentimental-Romantic Decadence of the 18th & 19th Centuries," the third chapter of his history of the short poem in English, Forms of Discovery (1967), and in "Problems for the Modern Critic of Literature" (1956). Winters locates two important sources of the Romantic overthrow of reason: Shaftsburian sentimentalism and the doctrine of the association of ideas as promulgated by Hobbes, Locke, and Addison. According to Winters, Shaftsbury (and Pope in his Essay on Man) in his view that reason is evil, impulse good, and improvement of self or society largely unnecessary is guilty of the greatest evil: "the work of more than two thousand years of painstaking effort to understand human nature, the conclusions of some of the greatest minds in the history of man, were discarded in favor of a few simple and irresponsible formulas." The doctrine of the association of ideas could be no more than a complement to sentimentalism in its assertion that all abstract concepts evolve from what the senses perceive and that progression from idea to idea should be accompanied by movement from one suggestive sense impression to another.[43] This gradual erosion of the primacy of idea and statement in favor of image and emotional suggestion begins as early as Milton's early poems, accelerates in the odes of Collins and Gray, and reaches apotheosis in the poems of the British Romantics, Victorians, Aesthetics, and the "anti-Romantic" Moderns. Winters notes the pervasive influence of the British Aesthetics in Ezra Pound's early poetry and the doctrine of associationism

in Pound's theory of Imagism (the natural object as adequate symbol) and poetic practice in The Cantos, that amalgamation of sense impressions.[44] In the case of Eliot, Winters was one of the first to argue that although "he is known primarily as the leader of the intellectual reaction against the romanticism of which he began his career as a disciple, . . . his intellectualism and his reactionary position are all an illusion." In a close scrutiny of Eliot's critical prose, Winters ferrets out a number of beliefs that he associates with Romanticism. These include the following: an adherence to the doctrine of autotelic art, the emphasis on emotional intensity and expressivism in the poetic process, the doctrine of the objective correlative that embodies emotion rather than thought, the idea that the poet is largely determined by the spirit of the age (hence Eliot must be essentially Romantic, classic only in tendency), the separation of ethics and aesthetics in the reader's experience of the poem, the demand for dramatic presentation of immediate experience that gives no hint of reflective meditation, Romantic irony and ennui, and the idea of imitative form (fragmentary poems expressing fragmented minds and culture). In the face of such evidence, Winters calls Eliot's anti-Romanticism "the illusion of reaction"; and as for his conversion to royalism, Anglicanism, and classicism, to judge from his poetry Winters says, "it really meant nothing at all."[45]

Equally contemptible to Winters is the intellectual confusion of Robert Frost, "the spiritual drifter," who inherited the sensibility of an Emersonian Romantic and who, when unable to reconcile doubts about the benevolence of nature or the trustworthiness of impulse, simply wrote poems in total contradiction to one another rather than rejecting outright his Romantic ideas. Such ideas include, besides the two just mentioned, the desire for solitude, for the wilderness, distaste for the machine, Romantic

irony, disdain for reason, and disillusionment with social or political action.[46] Like Frost, Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens are also good but divided poets whom Winters finds corrupted by various Romantic values but who are still unable to accept Romantic faith in emotions, impulse, and nature without doubts. Stevens, for instance, accepts the Romantic theory of imagination as the creator of order, but for Stevens such order is at best a supreme fiction, for the universe is nominalistic in essence and there is no transcendence. One is left with Romantic irony, ennui, and the cultivation of the senses. Poets like Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams ("no ideas but in things") because more thoroughly Romantic are, to Winters, of lesser stature. Given these views, one can only be glad that Winters' single recorded comment on Dylan Thomas is that he was "one of the most naive romantics of our time."[47] Considering Winters' comments on Thomas's fellow travellers among the Romantic Moderns, the disgust that Winters must have felt toward Thomas must have been almost beyond words.

Although Winters might have felt a similar disgust at being linked for any reason with the pro-Romantic advocate Harold Bloom, he is in substantial agreement with Bloom on three important points: (1) Modernist poetry is in great part a continuation of Romantic practice; (2) the vociferously anti-Romantic Moderns were themselves largely Romantic both in theory and especially in practice; and (3) those Moderns who inherited Romantic ideas and forms seem less confident in their beliefs than the earlier Romantics -- all of which emerge from the catastrophe of dualism.

It would be unfair, however, to leave the impression that only passionate defenders or detractors of Romanticism recognize its significant influence on Modernist poets. As a representative example of the more dispassionate analyses of the Romantic influence on Modernism, one may turn

to Randall Jarrell's essay (mentioned earlier), "The End of the Line" (1942).[48] Jarrell's position, similar to that of Morse Peckham, is that since Romanticism is based on constant experimentalism and the search for originality it is a movement that can only supersede itself by rejecting its former traits for new ones or by selecting a single trait and developing it to the point that all its possibilities seem exhausted. The only way for Romanticism to become something else is to exhaust all novelty or to repeat its old forms so consistently that it hardens into a new classicism. In Jarrell's view, Modernism is the end of the line, the final depletion of the stock of significant variations, the final evolution of Romanticism. Jarrell attributes the earlier critical perception of Modernism as anti-Romantic to a variety of causes: the rejection of particular Romantic practices which obscured the deeper Romantic desire for transcendence even of its own previous forms; the need of Modernist poets to establish their own identities and to achieve originality by separating themselves from poetry of the recent past; the striking juxtaposition of inherited Romantic traits with non-traditional ones or the selective development of a single trait at the expense of all others; the confusing situation caused by some poets who wrote anti-Romantic essays while unaware that they were still writing poetry in the Romantic tradition; and the confusion by some Modern poets of enervated late Romantic practioners (Decadents, Georgians, coffee-table poets) with the more powerful early Romantics. In spite of all this obfuscation, Jarrell detects a great number of Romantic traits in Modernist poetry. Almost all of these traits seem to indicate that what Romantics and Moderns share is a sense of having been cut off from an inherited system of values, a distrust of the faculty of reason that upheld the old system, and the belief that the self must forge some new relation to the external world,

though what that relation is remains uncertain. According to Jarrell, Romantics and Moderns share the following traits: an emphasis on originality and experimentalism; alogical and disproportionate form; intense, even violent emotion; obscurity resulting from aloofness or self-isolation of the artist; an interest in the unconscious, elusive states of mind, the primitive; a rejection of the present for the past; a rejection of science and industrialism for a hierarchical and hieratic past; and a defensive Romantic irony. Jarrell says that "this complex of qualities is essentially Romantic, and the poetry that exhibits it is the culminating point of romanticism," including Dylan Thomas's "semi-surrealist experimentalism" which exhausts that possibility for British poets.[49]

Such essays by Winters and Jarrell were harbingers of many critical studies in the fifties and sixties that sought to modify the Modernist revaluation of literary history. The influence of the critical writings of Eliot, Leavis and Scrutiny, and the American New Critics had tended to displace the Romantics in favor of the Metaphysicals, Milton in favor of Donne, and the imagination in favor of wit. In books like Leavis's Revaluation (1936) and Cleanth Brooks's Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939), the major poets are read and evaluated according to the tradition of metaphysical wit. Only Keats seems susceptible enough to such a reading to be praised, while Shelley is damned, Wordsworth oddly lauded for being Donne-like in spots. By the sixties, however, Romantic scholars had put so much effort into demonstrating that the Romantic poets were innocent of the Modernist charges of shoddy technique, vagueness of thought, emotional obscurantism, and dreamy escapism that the tables turned: now the Moderns looked familiarly Romantic. One of the most striking indications of the success of Romantic scholars in demonstrating the continuity of Romanticism and Modernism is Cleanth

Brooks's forthright revaluation of his own earlier view of the matter in "A Retrospective Introduction" (1965) to his Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939). Brooks admits that the anti-Romantic Moderns were in opposition only to a "debased" Romanticism and that post-World War II poetry has been "essentially pro-Romantic": thus, he says, "any attempt to set the /Modernist/ revolution in a wider context will have to concern itself with Romanticism. Indeed, one might as well begin at the beginning with Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were the first poets to bring into distinct focus the predicament of modern man."[50] Brooks follows the Romantic theorists discussed in Chapter II in defining that predicament as the problem of finding, after the triumph of scientific rationalism, "a way of bringing man back into a meaningful relation with his universe." More significantly, Brooks now sees not only the symbol, the polysemous metaphor of Wimsatt, anti-rhetorical poetic diction, and alogical juxtaposition (Winters' "associationism") as important Modern as well as Romantic devices, but he recognizes the central link between the two periods -- the problem of subject-object relations:

> For it was the split between the subjective and the objective -- the chasm between the life of the emotions and attitudes within the poet and the universe outside him -- that so much troubled the Romantic poets. The poetry of Wordsworth and the criticism of Coleridge are dominated by the attempt to bridge this chasm. It would be tidings indeed to learn that the American poets of the 1950's had finally spanned it . . . At any rate, it seems certain that poetry will continue for a long time to revolve around the matter of man's consciousness -- the consciousness which separates him from the other animals and alienates him from nature, but which at the same time is the very power that allows him to see nature, as it were, from the outside, and to see himself in the very act of seeing it.[51]

Such a view may seem remarkable, being made by the same critic who, in the preface to the original edition of that book, said that the Modernist

revolt had overturned the Romantics as the touchstones against which all other poets in the English tradition should be measured. However, Brooks's insistence elsewhere on the importance of concreteness, the organic image, organic unity of the poem, and the creative imagination, as he himself admits, comes directly from Coleridge. In fact, Brooks's desire to see the metaphysical conceit as just another instance of the imagination's desire to forge unity out of diversity, on which point he invokes Coleridge on imagination, is at the heart not only of The Well-Wrought Urn (1947) but his earlier essay "The Poem as Organism" (1940).[52] In fact, as one scholar has pointed out (Richard Foster in The New Romantics: A Reappraisal of the New Criticism), the New Critics may be seen as an extension of Romantic theory. Taking a position towards the New Critics similar to that taken by Winters toward Eliot and other Modern poets, Foster finds behind the classicist veneer of formalism a Romantic sensibility:

> Its core principle, that poetry provides "knowledge" of a higher kind than that of reason and science, seemed virtually to give poetry the status of a form of metaphysics or revelation. And the language in which the theory was couched -- strongly animistic, full of echoes of philosophic idealism, heavily weighted with the esoteric terminology and imagery of theology and religion -- showed that behind the theory was also a shared sensibility that was unorthodox, implicit with romantic heresy.[53]

Bloom, Winters, Jarrell, Brooks, and Foster, among many others, all had a part in revising Modernism's self-proclaimed anti-Romanticism. While none of these critics finds total identity between the two periods (as Wellek warned against both desparing "nominalism" and "monolithic" stereotyping in the distinction of "periods"), all of them recognize crucial similarities. Though couched in a variety of terms and phrases, these traits are amenable to being grouped around the problem of subject-

object relations. In the Modern era, as Brooks noted, the problem remains, though the solution becomes more critical, problematic, and possibly in the end, if J. Hillis Miller is right, chimerical and irrelevant.

Brooks's emphasis on the single important problem of subject-object relations as a shared concern of Romantic and Modern poets introduces the final section of this review of those important critics who link the two periods: a sampling of those who isolate a single trait of a Modernist poet and trace it to its source in Romantic theory. Although such studies range far beyond the limitations of this essay, one trait deserves special attention, a common concern with the self, either as the center of the search for value and objectivity, as the problem of self-consciousness, or as part of the problem of subject-object relations. Lilian Furst, in her analysis of the effects of the break up of the Enlightenment world-view, stresses that the Romantic sense of the estrangement of the self was in its essence passed on to the Moderns: "our relativism, our ambivalence, our hesitations of judgment, our unwillingness (or inability?) to settle on any firm standards -- all these are, in the last resort, developments from that crucial jettisoning of the Neo-classical definitions and the tentative questionings of the Enlightenment. The objective order was slowly and surely displaced by a principle of subjective reference."[54] David Thorburn, noting the work of such critics as Frye and Bloom, speaks of being "confronted with varying and powerful evidence for an essential continuity between the Age of Wordsworth and ourselves -- and for a continuity based in part on a recognition of self-consciousness as a specially Romantic malaise"; meanwhile, M. H. Abrams speaks of Romantic concepts of the self and its estrangement from nature as having "evolved

into the reigning diagnosis of our own age of anxiety: the claim that man, who was once well, is now ill, and that at the core of the modern malaise lies his fragmentation, dissociation, estrangement, or (in the most highly charged of these parallel terms) 'alienation'."[55] But what of the common early Modernist claim that poetry should be dry, hard, classical, objective? Stephen Spender answers this question by saying that although Modern writers are objective insofar as they are critically conscious of the act of writing as they perform it, they still take much of their materia poetica from subjective sources -- the unconscious, dreams, personal symbols, and private allusions -- which also account for the sense of obscurity and disunity in their works. The Moderns, says Spender, retain the Romantic belief "that everything said has to be re-invented from the deepest and most isolated centre of individual imagination," a belief that simply reflects the fact that "the Romantics are of our modern world, and modern poetry comes out of their situation."[56] Other critics see the emphasis on objectivity as itself an indication that Modern poets are struggling to overcome the problem of intense subjectivity. C. K. Stead, for instance, in The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot, sees a bifurcation of nineteenth-century Romanticism into an emphasis on either aestheticism (subjective) or rhetoric (objective) in poetic practice. Eliot, in the search for undissociated sensibility, and Yeats, in the search for unity of being, try to recombine the two tendencies into one, an effort that Stead calls the "attempt to solve those fundamental problems, rooted in Romanticism, which have confronted all English-speaking poets of this century."[57] Citing Eliot's famous remarks in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that poetry is not an expression of but an escape from emotion and personality, and that only those who possess personality know what it is to desire release from it,

Geoffrey Hartman comments that Eliot, in these remarks, is completely within the Romantic tradition, for "he is a knowing witness to the irreversible self-centeredness of modern writers."[58] Speaking of poetic form as well as theory, Edward Bostetter has written that the experimentalism and "classicism" of Modernist poets was a stylistic revolution within Romantic tradition, incited by the desire to escape self-consciousness and the influence of debased Romantic practitioners. In Eliot's case, for example, Bostetter isolates Romantic concerns for salvation, the inquiry into the nature of the self, the loss of faith in contemporary society or any curative social action, and the poet's own highly conscious awareness of himself as a poet in the act of creating a poem as indicative of the true character of Eliot's poetic practice. From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, Bostetter concludes, public poetry has been eroded in favor of the private poetry of the self, a poetry whose final goal is to relieve the burden of self-consciousness by releasing the voice of the unconscious into art.[59] Bostetter's claim that the Modernist answer to the inherited problem of self-consciousness is to seek aid from the region of the unconscious mind raises the question as to whether and how the Modernist poets have solved the problem of the Romantic self.

Rene Wellek speaks of "that /Romantic/ attempt, apparently doomed to failure and abandoned by our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness"; yet George Boas asserts just the opposite, saying that although the re-submergence of the unique, conscious self in the Collective Unconscious solves the Romantic problem, the solution itself is a kind of oblivion whose curative power exacts too high a price.[60] Irving Howe traces the idea of the self as the center of the search for value from Romanticism

to Modernism in three phases: (1) an assertive, transcendental self (High Romantic); (2) a withdrawn, inward-looking self (Aesthetic); and (3) a self disgusted with and weary of its own individuality (Modern). For the extreme Modernist, Howe argues, the transcendental dimension to life and the belief that the self could detect spiritual significance in nature have been withdrawn; however, Howe says in qualification that some Modernist writers are reluctant to abandon the more ambitious stance of the earlier Romantic self.[61] A more sophisticated version of Howe's position is developed by Robert Langbaum in The Modern Spirit: Essays on the Continuity of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Literature. Summarizing the "Romantic myth" in terms similar to those of Northrop Frye and identifying the problem of subject-object relations as central to Romanticism and Modernism, Langbaum draws a distinction between the early Romantic view of the self as "authentic" and the later Romantic (i.e., Modern) view of the self as "problematical" or even unknowable. According to Langbaum, the early Romantics separated the idea of the self from its social context, establishing its validity through solitary contact with nature and the "sincerity" of the expression of emotions. Langbaum seems to believe that the early Romantic self appropriated to itself too much power and too much responsibility for the discovery of value, an appropriation that led first to excessive self-consciousness and second to the later Romantic (i.e., Modern) solution: the re-connection of the expansive, conscious self with the unconscious force in the mind and nature, now recognized through its expression in myth as the source of individual consciousness, human civilization, and man's idea of God. This reconnection of the conscious self with unconscious force is an ambiguous solution to the Romantic problem of subject-object relations and other Romantic dualisms. Although a degree of unity is

achieved, there is a corresponding loss of power and autonomy. As Langbaum himself admits, representative Modern writers "have not been moaning over the so-called 'loss of the self' -- which is really the loss of the inadequate nineteenth-century idea of the locked-up, autonomous, magically potent self that never could sustain the high claims made for it when it was regarded as the one remaining source of value in a world where value was no longer objective." However, Langbaum reserves his greatest praise for those Modern writers whom he calls "twentieth-century romanticists," writers who both sustain in large part the magically potent self even while simultaneously recognizing the curative effect of linking that self to larger, unconscious forces in nature, culture, and the mind.[62] Whether this Langbaumian compromise is a stable one remains doubtful to others. Wylie Sypher in Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art argues that the existentialist belief that the ground of being is nothingness marks the end of the Romantic self that could never sustain its visions of its own ideal form because it was "unable to cope with the burden of the ordinary." Consequently, Sypher remarks, the Modernist revolt "may be a final deromanticizing of man's view of himself; it suggests that any surviving humanism must be based upon a negative view of the self, if not a cancellation of the self."[63] Although Sypher's formulation is extreme and does not apply to all Modernist poets, it still supports the view that the Moderns inherited from the Romantics a notion of the self that had to be addressed, even if the annihilation of that self was one radical solution (Langbaum has noted a less radical one) to the problem of that self and its relation to the external world whose ground of being is nothingness. For Dylan Thomas, at any rate, the dream of the Romantic self was a decisive influence on the whole direction of his poetry, and one of the most

interesting aspects of his poetic development is the struggle to sustain the Romantic self in the face of various forms of contemporary despair. And to Dylan Thomas's Romantic inheritance this study now turns.

Although Dylan Thomas said that he preferred "what I think about verse to be in the verse" (SL 270), the poet has left numerous letters, essays, broadcasts, and lecture notes that contain important statements of his views on the nature of poetry. So many of Thomas's poems, however, may be read as poems-on-poetics that any survey of his poetical works becomes itself in large part an analysis of Thomas's views, in poetry, on poetry. No poet, of course, is bound by law to practice in his poetry what he preaches in his prose: the case of Eliot is an ideal example. Nor is the value of a poet's work necessarily enhanced or diminished by a superficial adherence to principles stated outside the poems. Still, a poet's critical prose or recorded opinions may provide a tentative framework in which to place his poems or else may provide clues to a deeper understanding of particular aspects of his poetic practice, especially his poems-on-poetics. Dylan Thomas's prose statements are a particularly rich source of evidence in support of the proposition that the problem of subject-object relations, as inherited from the Romantics, is a central concern of Thomas as a poet. Furthermore, the presence of this problem, as Northrop Frye demonstrated in "The Romantic Myth," accounts for other traits often associated with Romantic poetry. Of these traits, Thomas, in his essays and letters, displays concern with the following: the importance of imagination as an image-making power; the epiphanic moment; poetry as the expression of intense emotion; the poet as hero of his own poems, an exile from society; the organic nature of the image and the poetic process; the desire of the poet to remove the ontological barrier between word and thing; the inner quest for psychic

unity; the problem of self-consciousness; the child as a figure of unity of being; the displacement of religious values into psychological and poetic terms; the importance of the relation of man and nature; and the poetic significance of the power of love.

Dylan Thomas was concerned with all three possible tendencies in the relationship between subject and object, inner self and outer world: (1) the tendency of the subject to become primary, absorbing or devaluing the object; (2) the tendency of the subject to conform to the object or to enter the object; or (3) the tendency of subject and object to coalesce or to correspond in some fitted, balanced way to one another. Concerning the first of these tendencies, an extraordinary letter written by Thomas to Daniel Jones, his closest childhood friend in Swansea, has just recently been published. Written in 1935 when Thomas, then twenty-one, was spending time alone writing in an Irish cottage, the letter is an impassioned plea to Jones not to forsake the imaginary world of their childhood. Jones (later Dr. Jones), a composer, had spent several years with Thomas creating a large world of imaginary characters, stories, and compositions in music and poetry similar to the world created by the Bronte children in Haworth Parsonage in the nineteenth century. Speaking of Jones's house, Warmley, Thomas writes of the WARMDANDYLANLEY-WORLD, an inner imaginative world, and the unimaginative life in London, the outer world untransformed by imagination. Filled with fantastic puns and obscure allusions to the characters (led by the Reverend Alexander Percy) and events of the WARMDANDYLANLEY-WORLD (i.e., Dan Jones, Dylan Thomas, and Warmley, the Jones's home), the letter reveals the extent of Thomas's almost obsessive concern with "inner" and "outer" (subject and object):

> This is the first long letter I've ever written to you. I'm not much good at writing letters. I can't strike

the, if I may coin a phrase, happy medium between trying to be funny, not trying to be funny, and trying not to be funny . . . I never can believe that the Warmley days are over . . . that there should be no more twittering, no more nose-on-the-window pressing and howling at the streets, no more walks with vampire cries, and standing over the world . . . I can't believe that Percy, who droppeth gently, can have dropped out of the world . . . that the queer, Swansea world, a world, thank Christ that was self-sufficient, can't stand on its bow legs in a smoky city full of snobs and quacks / London /. I'm surer of nothing than that that world, Percy's world in Warmley, was, and still is, the only one that has any claims to permanence; I mean that this long, out-of-doored world isn't much good really, that it's only the setting, is only supposed to be the setting, for a world of your own -- in our cases, a world of our own -- from which we can interpret nearly everything that's worth. And the only world worth is the world of our own that has its independent people, people like Percy, so much, much more real than your father or my mother, places and things and qualities and standards, and symbols much bigger than the exterior solidities, all of its own. Didn't we work better, weren't poems and music better, weren't we happier in being unhappy, out of that world, than in -- not even out of -- this unlocal, uncentral world where the pubs are bad and the people are sly and the only places to go are the places to go to? . . . Here in Ireland I'm further away than ever from the permanent world, the one real world in a house or a room, very much peopled, with the exterior, wrong world -- wrong because it's never understood out of the interior world -- looking in through the windows. This sort of nostalgia isn't escapist by any means, you know that; just as the only politics for a conscious artist -- that's you and me -- must be left-wing under a right-wing government, communist under capitalism, so the only world for that WARMDANDYLANLEY-MAN must be the WARMDANDYLANLEY-WORLD under the world-of-the-others. How could it be escapism? It's the only contact there is between yourself and yourselves, what's social in you and what isn't . . . now, here in this terribly out-of-the-way and lonely place, I feel the need for that world, the necessity for its going on, and the fear that it might be dying to you, that I'm trying to resurrect my bit of it, and make you realise again what you realise already: the importance of that world because it's the only one, the importance of us, too, and the fact that our poems and music won't and can't be anything without it . . . I

> stand under an absurdly high hill -- much too high, our world has its hills just the proper, the nice length (I'm arching my index-finger and thumb and joining them tastefully) -- and shout to it, "Go on, you big shit, WARMDANDYLANLEY-WORLD has a hill twice as beautiful and with a ribbon and a bell on it, and a piece of boiled string on the top, if the WARMDANDYLANLEY-MAN wants it like that." (MFDD 38-42)

Written by a young poet of twenty-one with a book of poems to his credit, these passages may seem no more than a delayed exit from the fantasy world of childhood, a passing phase. Jones, however, who not only knew Thomas intimately as a person but who saw all of Thomas's important creative work from beginning to end, makes two important observations on this letter. First, when Thomas returned from his solitary work period in Ireland, his friends noticed an important change in his personality and appearance. Jones remarks: "he had changed physically, and part of the physical change, in superficial appearance, was easy to describe; the expressions of the face and eyes, perhaps, not so easy to notice or to comment upon. As for the change in his character and outlook it may not have been observed but it was there . . . I ask the reader to examine any photograph of Dylan taken after 1935. Pose, gesture, action, all the details a cursory glance will reveal, mean one thing: the face, and especially the eyes, mean another. Is it only by hindsight that doom can be read there? The essential part of Dylan, I believe, was enclosed in a shell, and the desire for freedom, impossible to fulfil, was his personal tragedy" (MFDT 43, 45). As Jones sees it, Thomas's lament over the demise of the world of Warmley was part of a larger metaphysical issue that dominated Thomas's life and poetry: ". . . the core of the letter . . . consists of a serious, direct and unaffected approach in prose to a philosophical question. That question is no less than the fundamental one: what is reality? Is it the fantasy 'inside' or the appearance 'outside', generally observed and acknowledged?" To Thomas,

Jones, concludes, "the internal is the only reality, or, if there is any reality apart from the internal, its reality is of comparatively negligible degree, and certainly of less significance" (MFDT 44). To recast slightly Jones's remarks, one may argue that the letter describes an ideal situation in which the poet, by the exercise of imagination, creates a heterocosm which in turn becomes a standpoint from which the poet can "interpret" the exterior world. The plangent tone of the letter, however, reveals the difficulty of ignoring the exterior world, of successfully withdrawing into the anti-natural, aesthetic construct, Byzantium or Grecian urn. In the same letter, Thomas admits that "dog-eaten self-consciousness" is the cause of this outpouring, and his subsequent poetic career demonstrates the insufficiency of aesthetic withdrawal in solving the problem of the relation of self and world. Jones is inaccurate in claiming that the external world was of "comparatively negligible" value to Thomas, especially in later poems like "Fern Hill," although Thomas's emphasis on the self as the center of the search for value remains strong throughout his work. More precisely, Jones claims at the end of his reminiscence that the inability to reconcile subject and object, inner and outer worlds, was a major cause of Thomas's long suicide by alcoholism: ". . . there was a dichotomy in Dylan's character /serious poet/public clown/, at first deliberately created, then widening perhaps beyond his control. I cannot imagine how these two parts of his personality could be integrated and survive as one. When plus and minus meet, matter and anti-matter, the result is zero, annihilation . . . For Dylan, the end was implicit in the beginning; nothing was possible except the course his life pursued, nothing possible beyond his predestined end" (MFDT 116). To this assessment one may add the remark made by Thomas to Ivan Moffat that he drank to right the

imbalance between inner order and outer disorder (Ferris 189). Thomas's wife, Caitlin, also commented that "he lived in a world of his own: 'out of this world'" (Life 249). Thomas's letters and essays support these comments by both his close friend Jones and his wife Caitlin, for these two have detected not simply a psychological obsession but a fundamental principle of Thomas's poetics.

Many of Thomas's comments on the relationship between the self and the world assume the primacy of the self. Almost always concerned with this relationship as a problem for the poet rather than as a general philosophical question, Thomas accepts the Romantic predicament of beginning with the subjective self in any search for value and objectivity. Moreover, Thomas sometimes discusses the poetic process and the role of the poet in terms consistent with the Romantic myth's embodiment of the internalized quest, the redemptive nature of the poetic act, the poet as his own redeemer, and the longing for psychic unity as symbolized by the figure of the child and by Eden.

One of the most interesting of Thomas's letters is one sent to fellow writer Trevor Hughes (9 May 1933). There, Thomas, offering Hughes advice on how to write, reveals his own concept of the nature of poetic creation:

> . . . delve, deep, deep, into yourself until you find your soul, and until you know yourself. These two bits of advice aren't contradictory. The true search for the soul lies so far within the last circle of introspection that it is out of it. You will, of course, have to revolve on every circle first. But until you reach that little red hot core, you are not alive . . . Plunge, rather, head first and boldly into Charon's ferry. And who knows? Charon's ferry may turn at last into the river Jordan and purge you of ills. (SL 15)

This passage demonstrates various Romantic traits as outlined in Chapter II. Apparently drawing on Dante's Inferno for analogy, Thomas describes

self-knowledge in terms of an internalized quest, a descent into the hell of the self whose center contains one of the rivers of Hades, probably Acheron, on which Charon rides. If the search of the soul is successful, Thomas says, Acheron will be transformed into the river Jordan and the self will be transfigured, saved by the poetic process, just as Dante exits the last circle of hell to see the stars. Thomas's internalization of Dante's cosmology and the association of personal salvation with the process of artistic creation are consistent with Romantic theory. Like Christ harrowing hell, the poet quests into the center of the self, literally a living hell, and transforms it into paradise. Thomas is consistent in his Romantic translation of religious values into the secular context of poetic creation and the events of the psyche. In a Christmas Day letter in 1933 that he wrote to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas says "I want to believe, to believe forever, that heaven is being, a state of being, and the only hell is the hell of myself. I want to burn hell with its own flames" (SL 84). A notebook poem from February of that year, "Now understand a state of being, heaven" (N 200-01), reinforces this idea of displacement as does Thomas's remark that "God is the country of the spirit" (SL 29). Thomas calls his concern with the relationship between inner and outer worlds "a very slight adaptation of the Roman Catholic religion" (SL 10) -- it is hardly "slight" -- and once described his poetry as poems in praise of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God (Life 326). Whatever salvation the poet may attain must be of his own making. In John Malcolm Brinnin's Dylan Thomas in America, Thomas is quoted as saying that "I've always wanted to be own psychiatrist, just as I've always wanted everybody to be their own doctor and father" (DTA 256). This statement recalls Harold Bloom's remark that for the Romantics the "quest becomes the journey to re-beget the self, to be one's

own father," autogenesis being the final phase of the imagination's drive for autonomy.[64] Not surprisingly, Thomas's emphasis on the self and its search for salvation through imaginative creation yields the figure of Christ as symbol for the poet who harrows the hell of self. Thomas condemns the orthodox churches which praise a "vanished Christ," and he celebrates "the new Christ in the wilderness" who rises out of each individual man (SL 64). In the notebook poems, the poet is associated with the suffering Christ: "He, too, has known the agony in the Garden" (N 189). In another poem, the poet asserts "I am the chosen / One" (N 208) and elsewhere speaks of the agonies of consciousness in terms of Christ crucified:

> I was mortal to the last
> Long breath that carried to my father
> The message of his dying Christ (N 232).

The poem "This Bread I Break" (N 260-61) describes the process of poetic creation as identical with the transubstantiation of the body and blood of Christ in the mass. Other times, Thomas associates salvation with poetic creation without an overt poet-Christ analogy. In a passage quoted earlier from an essay on the minor poet James Chapman Woods, Thomas links salvation with the exercise of imagination (what Thomas calls "magic") in the manner of the Romantics:

> Mr. Woods has much to offer . . . he has a vocabulary steeped in classical tradition, and an ear for the secret magic of words. He is a scholar, which accounts for much; he is an accomplished metrician. But these are not the things that will take him to heaven; skill and learning will not link him hand in hand with Shelley, Blake and Keats, stepping shadowy from dark to light; rather will they leave him in the dark, tied back to back with Matthew Arnold, and the dark figures of the early twentieth century poets. (EPW 114-15)

In an answer to a questionnaire from New Verse, Thomas uses similar language to describe his own poetic quest: "my poetry is, or should be,

useful to me for one reason: it is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light" (EPW 149). Elsewhere, Thomas explicitly links salvation to the poetic process, as in an early letter to Trevor Hughes: "But, day by day, I realize more that . . . we could work out our separate providences, and reach at least some kind of heaven up a ladder of words" (TML 4). That this is Jacob's ladder seems clear from the phrase to "Jacob to the stars" in "Altarwise by Owl-light" (P 117). The linking here of the poet's use of language with the idea of redemption appears frequently in Thomas's writings. Justifying his extreme use of images of death and decay, Thomas casts the poet in the role of resurrector: "So many modern poets take the living flesh as their object, and, by their clever dissecting, turn it into a carcase. I prefer to take the dead flesh, and , by any positivity of faith and belief that is in me, build up a living flesh from it" (SL 74).

Language itself is revelation, the mode of expression of the imagination, the healer of the division between subject and object. As Frye claims, the Romantics "felt . . . an analogy between God and man as creators, between God's Word and the poet's word, between God's revelation in the Scriptural myth and the poet's revelation."[65] In Thomas, as in Balke, this analogy is almost pushed to an identity. Thomas speaks of the magical power of the word "drome" which, he says, "nearly opens the doors of heaven for me . . . you hear the golden gates swing backward as the last, long sound of the 'm' fades away . . . God moves in a long 'o'" (SL 74). Thomas seems to believe literally that original creation began with a Word and that the poet's words, imaginatively ordered, can restore him to paradise -- heaven or Eden -- which Thomas calls a state of being. Speaking of the poet's "holy consonants & vowels," Thomas describes creation: "in the beginning was a word I can't spell, not a

reversed Dog, or a physical light, but a word as long as Glastonbury and as short as pith" (SL 127). Thomas takes deadly seriously Coleridge's analogy between the Primary Imagination of God and the Secondary Imagination of the poet. If they are alike in kind, then the poet may be able to shape the external world by the exercise of his imagination and may even overcome the subject-object division. In the short story "A Prospect of the Sea," Thomas imagines the poet-protagonist's quest for unity of being in terms of a return to Eden:

> When God was sleeping, he had climbed a ladder, and the room three jumps above the final rung was roofed and floored with the live pages of the book of days; the pages were gardens, the built words were trees, and Eden grew above him into Eden, and Eden grew down to Eden through the lower earth, an endless corridor of boughs and birds and leaves. (PS 9)

Eden-as-Word and Eden-as-thing converge, the ontological elevation of word into object as described in Chapter II by Paul de Man being attained. In his letters Thomas describes an epiphanic moment in nature in terms of the interrelatedness of word and thing:

> It was as if the night were crying, crying out the terrible explanation of itself. On all sides of me, under my feet, above my head, the symbols moved, all waiting in vain to be translated. The trees that night were like prophet's fingers. What had been a fool in the sky was the wisest cloud of all -- a huge, musical ghost thumping out one, coded tune. (SL 53)

God's creation is both Word and thing, as are the poet's words. Like Blake, Thomas strove to perceive the full form of nature, not simply vegetable nature. He distinguishes between the materialist (governed by reason) and the spiritualist (governed by imagination): ". . . perhaps the materialist could be called the man who believes only in the part of the tree he sees, & the spiritualist a man who believes in a lot more of the tree than is within his sight" (SL 85). Similarly, the poet is

always "deeper and deeper driving towards the final intensity of language: the words behind words" (QEOM 9). Ideally, then, for Thomas poetry is total revelation, the total identity (not simply analogy) between God and man, Word and words and things, creation and poetry. By using language imaginatively, man can attain unity of being and re-enter the state of Eden. In "Poetic Manifesto" Thomas describes in terms of the Eden myth a child's belief that words and things are one: "that was the time of innocence; words burst upon me . . . words were their spring-like selves, fresh with Eden's dew, as they flew out of the air" (EPW 155). In childhood, words were unnecessary as signs, links between poet and world; later, with the fall into self-consciousness, words became the vital link with paradise. In a remark made just days before his death, Thomas associated Eden with the throwing off of the burden of consciousness: "I want to go to the Garden of Eden, to die . . . to be forever unconscious" (DTA 273). Similarly, in his recent biography of Thomas, Paul Ferris notes an extraordinary dream that Thomas once told to his poet friend Danny Abse, a "dream" all the more significant since Abse thought it consciously made up by Thomas:

> . . . in his dream he had floated into a large unlit cavern and there saw Job smitten by boils sitting with his three false comforters. That cavern led into another, and that one into yet another, and back back in time Dylan wandered in his dream, seeing one Biblical scene after another . . . Until he wandered right back to the darkest cave of all, the very first one, and there saw a man and a woman hand in hand. I doubt if this was a real dream but it does illustrate the direction of Dylan Thomas's imagination. A journey back to Paradise . . . (Ferris 352)

Another internalized quest in the Romantic tradition, the biblical myth embodies Thomas's strong desire to return to a state of undivided unity. For Thomas, the movement from childhood to adulthood was always seen in

mythic terms as the fall from Eden into the world of process and time. FitzGibbon, Thomas's official biographer, says of the poet's expressed desire to return to the Edenic state of childhood that "this emotion is of far greater complexity, and nostalgia becomes an inadequate word with which to define it" (Life 258). Harold Bloom identifies the failure of Romantic imagination to transform the self and world as resulting in "a poetry that . . . became a study of the nostalgias, of the lost childhood of each creator."[66] Thus, one of the central questions to be addressed in a survey of Thomas's poetry is whether the longing for childhood and Eden, as these appear in the poems, is a corruptive nostalgia or a symbol of unity of being that synthesizes the child's word with the adult's. In any case, what is clear is Thomas's view that the poet faces subjectively an external world with which he must somehow come to terms.

This sense of the primacy of the self in the poet's search for value is one of the central tenets of Thomas's critical prose. So frequently does Thomas pose as the Romantic Bard, able to identify himself with all life external to himself, that the pose becomes an object of self-parody, as in his poem "The Countryman's Return" (P 154-57). In a letter to his close friend, the poet Vernon Watkins, Thomas describes this poem as "this half comic attack on myself . . . this middle-class, beardless Walt [Whitman] who props humanity, in his dirty, weeping, expansive moments, against corners & counters & tries to slip, in grand delusions of all-embracing humanitarianism, everyone into himself" (LVW 85). (Thomas also kept a photograph of Whitman in his workshop in Laugharne.) Similarly, in a letter to Trevor Hughes, Thomas describes the poet's mission as that of absorbing into the self the external world: "I am conscious of more external wonders in the world. It is my aim as an artist . . . to bring these wonders into myself, to prove beyond doubt to myself that the flesh

that covers me is the flesh that covers the sun, that the blood in my lungs is the blood that goes up and down in a tree. It is the simplicity of religion" (SL 87). But Thomas does not stop there. The poet absorbs imaginatively the external world because of "my self-centeredness, my islandic egoism"; however, this task is only an exercise of sorts, the final task being an expansive rather than a contracting identification: ". . . for the time at least, I realize that it is impossible for me to raise myself up to the altitude of the stars, and that I am forced, therefore, to bring down the stars to my own level and to incorporate them in my own physical universe" (SL 87). In his short story, "The Mouse and the Woman," Thomas describes his poet-protagonist in terms of the self's ability to absorb and shape the outer world: "gradually the chaos became less, and the things of the surrounding world were no longer wrought out of their own substance into the shapes of his thought" (PS 75). This tendency to absorb the outer into the inner world is especially true of Thomas's earlier poems. In a broadcast entitled "On Reading One's Own Poems," Thomas himself mentions "the very many lives and deaths . . . seen . . . in my first poems, in the tumultuous world of my own being" (QEOM 137). Almost as if he were building up, bit by bit, Blake's Albion or Universal Man, Thomas describes the centrality of the self as it absorbs ideas into images drawn from its body:

> All thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Therefore the description of a thought or action -- however abstruse it may be -- can be beaten home by bringing it onto a physical level. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells, or senses.
>
> Through my small, bonebound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, sensed all. All I write is inseperable / sic / from the island. As much as possible, therefore, I employ the scenery of the island to describe the scenery of my thoughts,

> the earthquake of the body to describe the earthquake of the heart. (SL 48)

In this passage the "Romantic image" emerges as Thomas's chief poetic device: a link between abstract and concrete, idea and image, the cosmos and the single self, the image fuses various opposites together. In an earlier letter, Thomas, again discussing "my beastly inner and outer" (SL 11), does not urge aesthetic withdrawal; rather, he argues that one must live separately in both worlds, although the great artist may heal the division between them:

> I don't urge a monastic seclusion, and preoccupation with the invisible places . . . You must live in the outer world, suffer in it and with it, enjoy its changes, despair at them . . . Where the true artist differs from his fellows is that that, for him, is not the only world. He has the inner splendor . . . The outer and inner worlds are not, I admit, entirely separate. Suffering colours the inner places, and probably adds beauty to them. So does happiness. . . . Perhaps the greatest works of art are those that reconcile, perfectly, inner and outer. (SL 10; my italics)

Clearly, Thomas is here aware of the Romantic problem of subject-object relations, of inner and outer worlds, and the need for reconciliation between the two.

In practice, Thomas uses the image as almost his sole device for fostering this reconciliation. Although he also experienced the frustration involved when the shaping spirit of imagination falters -- ". . . at the root of it all, I can't reconcile life and art" (SL 9) -- he also strove to overcome division. Quoting Auden, Thomas rejected political solutions in favor of poetic ones, a revelation of "the old universal architecture" of the cosmos, a complete humanization of the universe and simultaneous universalization of the Romantic self by a spiritual restoration of language to its pre-fall state of purity:

> Does one need 'New styles of architecture, a change of heart'? Does one not need a new consciousness of the old

> universal architecture and a tearing away from the old heart of the things that have clogged it? . . . We look upon a thing a thousand times; perhaps we shall have to look upon it a million times before we see it for the first time. Centuries of problematical progress have blinded us to the literal world; each bright and naked object is shrouded around with a thick pea-soup mist of associations; no single word in all our poetical vocabulary is a virgin word, ready for our first love, willing to be what we make it. Each word has been wooed and gotten by a vast procession of dead litterateurs who put their coins in the plate of a procuring Muse, entered at the brothel doors of a divine language, and whored the syllables of Milton and the Bible.
> . . . All we need do is to rid our minds of the humbug of words, to scorn the prearranged leaping together of words, to make by our own judicious and, let it be prayed for, artistic selection, new associations for each word. (SL 90)

Paul Ferris, Thomas's second major biographer, says of Thomas's religious beliefs that "religion was a stage-prop of his poetry; he used its language and myths which he had learnt in childhood, without ever absorbing or caring much about its central beliefs" (Ferris 43). It is important to keep this fact in mind. For example, in the passage just quoted above, Thomas is fully in the Romantic tradition in displacing religious into poetic experience. The poet performs the miracle of restoring virginity to language, an act of transforming love, and by doing so is able to create original poetry by associationist technique. Language is the avenue to psychic wholeness, not in a limited aesthetic sense, for language unites man and nature. Nature is God's Word; the poet's poem, like nature, is a thing created out of words, yet part of nature, too. As Thomas says, "a poem of mine is, or should be, a watertight section of the stream that is flowing all ways" (SL 191). Thus, in a literal sense, Thomas would unite the self and the world, man and God, by language: "I have news to scream up to heaven, and . . . heaven has news to scream down to me . . . I want to read the headlines in the sky: birth

of a star, death of a comet" (SL 84). At times, he may sound Whitmanesque, as in a miffed reply to Miss Johnson's charge that his poems seem isolated from the world: ". . . actually, 'seeking kinship,' with everything, daffodils, sheep, shoehorns, saints, bees, and uncles is exactly what I do do" (SL 205). In an earlier letter to the same recipient, Thomas makes even more explicit the function of the image in uniting the self and the world. Thomas believes that bald, rational statements of identity between man and nature are not enough. Such lines as "I am one with the wind and one with the breezes," he says, fail to "prove" (cf. Eliot's "logic of imagination," Crane's "logic of metaphor") that the relationship is vital:

> . . . The man who said, for the first time, 'I see the rose', said nothing, but the man who said for the first time 'The rose sees me' uttered a very wonderful truth. There's little value in going on indefinitely saying,
>
> 'I am one with the steamship & one with the trolley,
> And one with the airdale & one with the collie';
>
> there's too much 'Uncle Tom Collie & all' about that. Primarily, you see, the reader refuses to believe that you believe you are one with all these things; you have to prove it to him, and you most certainly won't be cataloguing a number of other things to which you say you are related.
>
> By the magic of words and images you must make it clear to him that the relationships are real. And only in, 'My blood is drawn from the veins of the roses', do you provide any proof. You gave the rose a human vein, and you gave your own vein the blood of the rose; now that is relationship. 'I am his son' means little compared with 'I am his flesh and blood.' (SL 80)

A word like "personification" seems too limited to describe what Thomas is doing, as it does when applied to the "dancing" daffodils in Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud." Essentially, it is a mutual vitalism and mutual consciousness that is revealed, not a "pathetic" fallacy in a pejorative, limited sense. The power of "magic" (magic = Thomas's "imagination" as it was Coleridge's "magical power") in language unites

man and nature. In the same letter to Miss Johnson, Thomas calls this process "linking the opposites together" and advises her to "link together these things you talk of, show, in your words & images, how your flesh covers the tree & the tree's flesh covers you . . . 'I am one with the opposites', you say. You are, I know, but you must prove it to me by linking yourself to the opposites and by linking the opposites together" (SL 81). Thomas's view of poetry's ability to deal with opposites is consistent with Blake's maxim in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell that "without Contraries is no progression" (plate 3). In fact, Thomas, who once said "I am in the path of Blake, but so far behind him that only the wings of his heels are in sight" (SL 23), quotes Blake directly in another epistolary discussion of "my theory of poetry." this time addressed to Charles Fisher, an old Swansea friend:

> You asked me to tell you about my theory of poetry. Really I haven't got one. I like things that are difficult to write and difficult to understand; I like 'redeeming the contraries' with secretive images; I like contradicting my images, saying two things at once in one word, four in two and one in six. But what I like isn't a theory even if I do stabilise by dogma my own personal affections. Poetry . . . should be as orgiastic and organic as copulation, dividing and unifying, personal but not private, propagating the individual in the mass and the mass in the individual. (SL 151)

Misquoting slightly, Thomas is remembering the lines in Blake's Milton: "The negation must be destroy'd to redeem the Contraries. / The Negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man."[67] As in the earlier letter to Miss Johnson on linking the opposites, here Thomas reveals again the central Romantic concern with unity of being, uniting the self ("individual") and the other ("the mass") as he earlier revealed his concern with uniting self and nature. Although poetry is "personal" it is not obscurely "private" as in some Aesthetic and Modernist verse. As Wordsworth

believed, so Thomas believes that the poet brings relationship and love. For Thomas, the poet is the man who experiences both inner and outer worlds and whose poems explain these worlds to others: "a good poem . . . helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him . . . a poet is a poet for such a very tiny bit of his life; for the rest, he is a human being, one of whose responsibilities is to know and feel, as much as he can, all that is moving around and within him" (QEOM 169-70; my italics).

Clearly, Thomas's prose explanations of his views on the primacy of the self and its relation to the external world are in the Romantic tradition. Also within that tradition are his views on the power that poetry exercises in affecting the relationship between the self and the world, subject and object. Because Thomas (in theory, anyway) discusses the identity of word and thing as an ideal, he asks that his poetry be read literally, just as the universe may be "read" as the "literal Word" of God. Just as the poet may control the shaping of his poems, so he may hope to transform the external world, for the "magic" that shapes them both is a single shaping spirit: imagination.

Thomas writes of the existence of "two worlds," a world apprehended as separate from language and a world experienced as language, as Word. The first world, he writes, is the world of materialism ("matter-of-fact as a stone") in which a quester ("the one-eyed ferryman") is a "total ghost." The other world, the external world as language, is the total world of spirit and matter. In this world one finds "a river of words," "the syllables of the fish," and the "rhyming hook" of the ferryman who catches (rhymes) the fish (SL 127). Rejecting "the old metaphysics" or dualisms of language and things, spirit and matter, Thomas is trying very hard to make his own words describe what words seem normally intractable

toward becoming: things. By becoming things (object), a poet's words (subject) bridge the subject-object chasm, just as things do when they become words as in Thomas's description of a night sky (quoted earlier) as full of "symbols" eager to be "translated" from their own "coded tune" into a poem (SL 53). If one can overcome the dualism of word and thing, then the nature of a linguistic "communion" between man and the external world becomes frightening, almost incredible. Thomas claims that the overcoming of the word/thing division allows the poet literally "to imagine that the oyster-catchers [a kind of bird] flying over the pearliest mudbanks are questioning all the time" (SL 127). Seen in their entirety, the "big and magic universe" (SL 85) and the "magic" that creates poetry (QEOM 168) are a single power: imagination. Thomas has described his own poetic practice and that of others in terms of the relationship between word and thing. In an anecdote reported by Alastair Reid, Thomas describes his long quest poem, "Ballad of the Long-legged Bait," as both word and thing. Reid explains:

> Once in New York, not long before he died, he was talking about writing. 'When I experience anything,' he said, 'I experience it as a thing and a word at the same time, both equally amazing.' He told me once that writing the 'Ballad of the Long Legged Bait' had been like carrying a huge armful of words to a table he thought was upstairs, and wondering if he could reach it in time, or if it would still be there.[68]

In his own critique of John Clare's poetry, Thomas berates Clare for acquiescing in the primacy of the external, material world rather than transforming that world by imaginative language: "Though words were his active medium, Clare worked towards them, not out of them, describing and cataloguing the objects that met his eyes. [To him] In the beginning was the object, not the word. He could not realize . . . that the word is the object" (EPW 180; my italics). Language is the tool of imagination with

which the poet shapes and/or reveals the final visionary form of nature. Thomas's notion that poets either write towards words (yielding to the untransformed object of immediate, unimaginative perception) or else from words (thus creating, shaping, or revealing the object from the perspective of the subject-poet who chooses the words and images) is present from his earliest to his latest comments on poetry.

In a 1933 letter to Pamela Johnson, Thomas admonishes her to adhere to Romantic doctrines of organic and expressive form: "poetry finds its own form; form should never be superimposed; the structure should rise out of the words and the expression of them" (SL 25). In 1934, Thomas develops this idea more fully in a passage that, significantly, uses Shelley as its example of the kind of poet Thomas thought himself to be:

> It's the word that attracted me. Have I ever told you of the theory of how all writers either work towards or away from words? Even if I have, I'll tell it to you again because it's true. Any poet or novelist you like to think of -- he either works out of words or in the direction of them. The realistic novelist -- Bennett, for instance -- sees things, hears things, imagines things, (& all things of the material world or the materially cerebral world), & then goes toward words as the most suitable medium through which to express these experiences. A romanticist like Shelley, on the other hand, is his medium first, & expresses out of his medium what he sees, hears, thinks, & imagines. (SL 115)

Shelley is distinguished from Bennett, who, like Blake's Urizen, struggles in the waters of materialism. Bennett, in Thomas's view, is limited by the physical senses and the absence of a visionary imagination that shapes as it reveals. In a letter of 1935 in which he repeats the same distinction yet again, Thomas emphasizes a bit more the idea of poetry as a mode of experience that breaks up the rationalist's apprehension of nature: "Poetry is a medium, not a stigmata on paper. Men should be two tooled, and a poet's middle leg is his pencil. If his phallic pencil turns into an elec-

tric drill, breaking up the tar and the concrete of language worn thin by the tricycle tires of nature poets and the heavy six wheels of the academic sirs, so much the better" (SL 151). Thomas once criticized Stephen Spender's political poem Vienna for depending too much upon "the wit" and "the intellectual consciousness," the result of Spender's failing in "working from words" as he had in earlier poems. Now working towards words (i.e., writing a propagandistic poem from a preconceived political perspective), Spender cannot pass Thomas's test: as a poem, Vienna leaves much to be desired; in the first place it leaves poetry to be desired? (EPW 170). Finally, speaking of his own poetics in a letter to Spender (quoted and analyzed in Chapter I) written less than a year before Thomas's death, Thomas praises Spender's review of Collected Poems because Spender rightly understands Thomas's method of composition: "your statement of understanding of my aim and method seems to be altogether true; and no critic has attempted, in writing about my most uneven and unsatisfactory work, to set out, plainly, the difference between the writing of poetry from words and the writing of poetry towards words -- though that's, of course, an oversimplification" (SL 386). Clearly, again, Thomas's concern with the relationship between the poet's words (subject) and the external world (object) as embodied in his from/towards distinction is symptomatic of the problem of subject-object relations.

Thomas's belief in the primacy of the poet and his words over recalcitrant external objects is consistent with his desire that words be apprehended as objects and objects as words or other units of speech or language. Thomas, whom his friend Vernon Watkins described as a "Blakean Christian" (Life 262, n. 1) but no orthodox Christian, certainly believed in some sort of catastrophic evil that resulted in the division of faculties within man and the division of man from a death-infested nature.

For all the miraculous events within and without the self, it was still incumbent upon the poet to seek a reintegration of mental faculties and reunion with nature. The poet's words must begin the action. If successful, the poet creates poems and apprehends nature whose significance is literal. Thomas's insistence upon literalism in poetry and nature has driven even literary critics into speechlessness at times. In the usual sense, Thomas's poems are full of symbols, and he punningly calls himself a "Symbol Simon" (SL 126). Yet in wrestling with the idea of a literalist poetry, Thomas is pursuing from a slightly different angle the problem of unity of being. Like Carlyle, Thomas believes in "natural supernaturalism." Thomas once said that "a fairy is not supernatural; she is the most natural thing in the world" (SL 89) and elsewhere asserted that in looking out on the world "we've got to be superstitious, natural, supernatural, all one huge satanic process" (SL 5). This ability to see the natural as supernatural Thomas describes as literalism: ". . . a man who believes in the supernatural is a man who takes things literally" (SL 89); earlier, Thomas defined such a man as a mystic: ". . . a mystic is a man who takes things literally" (SL 29). If a natural supernaturalist takes nature literally, then he should also, deduces Thomas, take poems literally. Applying the doctrine of literalism to poetry, Thomas complains that the rationalists' reduction of nature to matter ("centuries of problematical progress") and the failure of poets to raze off reductive "associations" adherent to the language that describes the natural-supernatural world have led to the separation of man from a vision of the true, full, visionary form of nature, "the old universal architecture" (SL 91). With such a view, it is not surprising that Thomas asks readers who request explanations of his poems to take them literally. Writing to a Mr. Peschmann in 1938, Thomas says of his poems that "the 'plot' is told in

images, and the images are what they say, not what they stand for" (SL 186). Reviewing the drafts of the chapters that would make up Henry Treece's book of Thomas, the poet wrote, "I ask only that my poetry should be taken literally" (SL 196). Finally, in the best-known instance of Thomas's insistence on literalism in the analysis of poems, he refutes Edith Sitwell's well-intentioned paraphrase of Sonnet 1 of "Altarwise by Owl-light" as "'the violent speed and the sensation-loving, horror-loving craze of modern life'" by complaining that "she doesn't take the literal meaning" (SL 198). Thomas then, paradoxically it seems, provides his own interpretation of the sonnet, which, relying on thematic summary and images, is hardly a literal reading (SL 199). Thomas simply cannot make words do all that he requires of them in the ideal. Apparently, that which corresponds in art to "natural supernaturalism" would be something like the "literal metaphor," an almost inscrutable concept. If a metaphor is literally true, and if nature is Word and if words are things, then to create literal metaphors is to move from the poet's Secondary Imagination toward God's Primary Imagination: saying is being. In his short story, "The Mouse and the Woman," Thomas describes a poet who creates a live, flesh-and-blood woman out of words:

> It is not a little thing, he thought, this writing that lies before me. It is the telling of a creation. It is the story of birth. Out of him had come another. A being had been born, not out of the womb but out of the soul and the spinning head. He had come to the cottage on the hill that the being within him might ripen and be born away from the eyes of men. He understood what the wind that took up the woman's cry had cried in his last dream. 'Let me be born,' it had cried. He had given a woman being. His flesh would be upon her, and the life that he had given her would make her walk, talk, and sing. And he knew, too, that it was upon the block of paper she was made absolute. There was an oracle in the lead of the pencil.
> . . . . . .
> . . . There, at the foot, the oval of her face towards him, she stood and smiled. The spray brushed her naked

> body, and the creams of the sea ran unheeded over her feet. She lifted her hand. He crossed to her. (PS 62-63)

Here the barrier between word and thing is certainly broken down. On the other hand, Thomas sometimes found himself trapped in words. Far from enjoying an aesthetic isolation in a world of words with private meanings, Thomas fought against an innate tendency to love words for their own sakes. He complains that he could not "get any real liberation, any diffusion or dilution or anything, into the churning bulk of words" and consequently fears "an ingrowing, the impulse growing like a toenail into the artifice" (SL 171). When the poet fails to turn his images outward into nature, he becomes a kind of materialist of the mundane word. In his short story "The Orchards," Thomas, punning off Wordsworth's famous sonnet, describes the poet-hero as a man imprisoned in language:

> The word is too much with us. He raised his pencil so that its shadow fell, a tower of wood and lead, on the clean paper; he fingered the pencil tower, the half-moon of his thumb-nail rising and setting behind the leaden spire. The tower fell, down fell the city of words, the walls of a poem, the symmetrical letters. He marked the disintegration of the ciphers as the light failed, the sun drove down into a foreign morning, and the word of the sea rolled over the sun. 'Image, all image,' he cried to the fallen tower as the night came on. 'Whose harp is the sea? Whose burning candle is the sun?' An image of man, he rose to his feet and drew the curtains open. Peace, like a simile, lay over the roofs of the town. 'Image, all image,' cried Marlais, stepping through the window on to the level roofs. (PS 85)

In "The World Is Too Much With Us," Wordsworth's materialists, imprisoned in a lower reason, cannot see the muninous powers of the natural supernatural world; in Thomas's "The Orchards," the poet cannot make the "magic" happen that transforms the outer world, breaking down the barrier of word and thing.

Thomas's understanding of the poetic process as it works in a creation of a poem begins, then, with the poet's desire to transform the external world, the "world-of-the-others" that imprisons the poet in Thomas's recently discovered letter to Daniel Jones. In his prose, Thomas remarks that the poet's creative power should be used either to change the outer world or else reveal its total visionary form beyond its purely material form as perceived by the reason. In the passage cited earlier, Thomas endorses the method of writing from words, as he thought Shelley did, so that the poet's vision is primary, unencumbered by a reductive "fidelity" to rationally perceived natural forms, an encumbrance that would reduce the poet to the status of a representationalist word-painter. In his essay on the poet James Chapman Woods, Thomas rejects as too limited the definition of poetry as "an attitude towards life"; instead, he names Rossetti as an example of "the poet who critically destroys what he sees in life, the poet who rhymes what he visualises" (EPW 114). In a 1933 letter to Pamela Johnson, Thomas describes a completely unfettered imagination that can create new perceptions and exercise control over the natural word: "I want to imagine a new colour, so much whiter than white that white is black . . . we don't worship nature; nature is what we wish it and worships us; we stop the sun, we tell the sun to go on" (SL 84). In an unpublished lecture note probably used in his post-war reading tours of America, Thomas is still fascinated by the possibility of controlling nature: ". . . I believe in the Aztec Emperors who held council, yearly, to deliberate upon the movements of the sun, and to question its power; and to search into its meaning. And yearly, they allowed the sun to continue on its wonted course" (Texas, Works I-O). Thomas grants directly to poetry the power to alter the universe through its "magic"

or imaginative power. In a 1946 discussion of poetry on BBC, Thomas defines poetry as "the magic beyond definition," the result of craftsman-like toil that leaves the poem "open" to receive the miraculous "accident of magic." Later in the discussion, Thomas offers an important statement on the nature of poetry:

> Poetry, to a poet, is the most rewarding work in the world. A good poem is a contribution to reality. The world is never the same once a good poem is added to it. A good poem helps to change the shape and significance of the universe, helps to extend everybody's knowledge of himself and the world around him. (QEOM 169; my italics)

Clearly, Thomas here defines the purpose and effect of a good poem in terms of the subject-object relation, a central problem in the Romantic tradition. By imaginative "magic," the poem changes and shapes the outer world while also existing in that world as a new creation. Also, Eliot's ideal order of great works, disturbed by the presence of a new work of significance, seems analogous to Thomas's notion.

Rightly ordered, the mind in the creation of such poetry is a mind of unified faculties. Thomas rejects a poetry of pure reason or a poetry that excludes the reason. In one letter he pledges "not to label the brain into separate compartments, that is, not to differentiate between what is in me that writes poetry and what is in me that says . . . at this time I lunch" (SL 83). Thomas calls his resolution "a resolution not to differentiate between what is called rational and what is called irrational, but to attempt to create, or to let be created, one rationalism" (SL 83). Thomas's "one rationalism" is roughly equivalent to Wordsworth's designation of imagination in The Prelude as "Reason in her most exalted mood." Although finding the source of his poetry in the irrational, Thomas seeks a synthesis of faculties to include the reason, an argument similar to Coleridge's idea that imagination orders the other,

subordinate faculties of the mind according to rank and worth. Elsewhere, Thomas has commented on the functions of the rational faculties of the mind in the poetic process. Refuting the suggestion that his poetry is the product of surrealist methods of composition, Thomas seems to distinguish three steps in the poetic process. First, images well up or are somehow drawn up from the unconscious mind, an irrational phenomenon. Second, the "rational processes of the intellect" select those images that will be used. Third, and last, the images are associated with one another to achieve the "imaginative purpose" of the poem which is to reveal "the real, imaginative world of the mind" (EPW 159-60). Thus, the selection of the image must involve the reason as part of its larger effort to express the imagination. As Thomas says in an early essay on the Modern poets, the image, though "first in importance" in a poem, must be made "intelligible" or else it "cannot stimulate or satisfy the imagination" (EPW 84). Such images must reflect not only material phenomena but the spirit within or behind such phenomena. In an extended critique of some of Pamela Johnson's poems, Thomas criticizes her images because "the images, striking as they are, are too patently obvious for the entire effect to stir more than one's visual senses." Only when "the spirit illuminates what the eyes have mirrored," he says, can the image succeed, for poetry is "the expression of the unchanging spirit in the changing flesh" (EPW 130-31, 137).

In his prose, then, Thomas, in the Romantic tradition, sets out important tasks for the imagination. Also, like the Romantics, Thomas experiences the disappointment that accompanies imaginative failure, and, as will be clear later, composes several poems in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode. In the letters, Thomas reveals that, like Wordsworth, he lost and then regained a sense of wonder before nature:

"this new year," he writes, "has brought back to my mind the sense of magic that was lost -- irretrievably I thought -- so long ago. I am conscious, if not of the probability of the impossible, at least of its possibility" (SL 88). Thomas admired Wordsworth's Intimations Ode (SL 24), and, although criticizing Wordsworth for not being more violent in his nature mysticism, Thomas later confessed that he once started to write his own Intimations Ode (LVW 92), a desire probably realized most fully in "Fern Hill." Like Wordsworth, too, Thomas experienced "visionary dreariness," the confrontation of the external world in the absence of the power of imagination. Significantly, Thomas calls himself "incorrigibly romantic" for desiring the transformation of what he sees:

> I wish I could see these passing men and women as ghosts only, and look on their cheap shapes and substances as the own cheapness of my mind clothing itself, for a minute's maggot, in all these diversities. But I see them solid and brutal; if there are ghosts, I am turnip and sawdust, and you are the longest shadow that ever fell under the sun. I wish I could see them as the pagan houses of flesh and blood, as creature-boned and sky-sexed, as the beings that have grown like a bug out of the garden of Eden, as the fleshes that need no brains but only the conscience of their fleshes and the consciousness of their fleshes and the freedom and the Mexican splendour. If I, incorrigibly romantic, could see them as a Yucatan people, call them to a cat-drinking ceremony, and know their names as childish Nazul, Tilim, & Yum-Chas, my Sunday worm would disappear like a Japanese mouse in a flash of green light -- you remember the story -- and my letter would be as loving as I wish it. (SL 103)

Thomas's "Sunday worm" is his melancholy at being unable to exercise the shaping spirit of imagination on the external world, this time, in the form of some dreary-looking passerby. In an essay on Howard Harris, a minor Welsh poet, Thomas again associates the Romantic poet with the transforming imagination:

> He is the first poet of Gower. He has shown that the romantic mind is never at a loss to find romance. If

> the real world cannot give it to him then the world of princesses and giants can. He does not need to find refuge in exotics . . . He has enough imagination to transform the smoking stacks of Landore, as he writes in one of his latest poems, into the 'domes and minarets of Ispahan' . . . . Mr. Harris can be called a romantic who has found the ideal themes for romance. Artistically, he has done them credit, but not justice. Only a great writer can give this absurd country, full of green fields and chimney stacks, beauty and disease, the loveliness of the villages and the smoke-ridden horror of the towns, its full value and recognition . . . he is original, romantic . . . (EPW 119-20)

The closest Thomas ever comes to defining "Romantic" directly, this passage clearly indicates that for him the term applies to the subjective poet wishing to transform by imagination a recalcitrant objective world.

Not only may imagination fail to transform what it perceives, but it may be threatened by a reductive rationality. Thomas once criticizes one of Vernon Watkins' poems for containing words that "seem so chosen, not struck out," a process of rational selection that may lead to an unsatisfactory poem. As Thomas complains, "I want a poem to do more than just to have the appearance of 'having been created'" (LVW 38), a desire satisfied by images that result from "fresh imagining" (LVW 39). Thomas criticizes the poetry of Woods because "he looks at life with an intellectual eye . . . then, with a fine chastity of phrase, and an almost classical lucidity of speech, sums life up" (EPW 114). Such moralistic, rationalist compositions Thomas calls "verse" as opposed to "poetry." Still speaking of Woods, Thomas distinguishes: "This ability to criticize in verse is a definite poetical accomplishment. But poetry needs more than that. A poet needs more than a merely analytical brain; he is not a lawyer; he is a creator and must contribute to life as well as dissect it" (EPW 114). The key phrase is

"merely analytical," for the poet may, in a sense, break up what he proposes to re-order. As Thomas writes to Watkins, "I ask you for a little creative destruction, destructive creation" (LVW 38). To Glyn Jones, a Welsh poet, Thomas once quoted approvingly Eliot's remarks on the use of meaning (rational, paraphrasable content) in a poem: "Remember Eliot: 'The chief use of the meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him" (SL 96). Reason produces "meaning," but some other faculty does "the real work" in the poem. In addition to these comments on the function of reason in poetry, Thomas describes what happens when one views nature from a rationalist's viewpoint. He laments that in such a view "all the dominions of heaven have their calculated limits; the stars move to man's arithmetic; and the sun . . . sinks as the drops in a test-tube dry and are gone" (SL 63). What "our imagination" can do that reason cannot is "change our angles of perspective," get us out of the limits of the self, so that we may see more of nature than reason reveals:

> I am very often -- especially in such fantastic frames of mind as have entertained me during the last few days -- convinced that the angle of man is necessarily inconducive to the higher thoughts. Walking, as we do, at right angles with the earth, we are prevented from looking, as much as we should, at the legendary sky above us and the only-a-little-bit-more-possible ground under us . . . . We see what we imagine to be a tree, but we see only a part of the tree; what the insects under the earth see when they look upwards at the tree, & what the stars see when they look downwards at the tree, is left to our imagination. And perhaps the materialist can be called the man who believes only in the part of the tree he sees, & the spiritualist a man who believes in a lot more of the tree than is within his sight . . . As it is, this perpetual right-angle of ours leads to a prejudiced vision. (SL 85)

Thomas's concern with perspectives or angles recalls somewhat Keats's

idea of Negative Capability. Just as Keats felt that he could imaginatively enter into the sensibility of a bird picking gravel or into the essence of a billiard ball, so Thomas says "I think in cells; one day I may think in rains" (SL 84) -- truly a life in which thought and sensation are one.

This focus on new perspectives reveals another trait rising from the Romantic concern with the self: originality. Thomas will often call directly for originality, spontaneity, and expressivism as important elements in the process of poetic composition. In addition, like Coleridge, he may describe the process of poetic creation by using organicist analogies. The use of such analogies, of course, implies that the end product of the poetic process is a new creation, unique, original, unified, and living.

In his letters and book reviews Dylan Thomas often emphasizes the importance of originality in poetic creation. Criticizing one of Vernon Watkins' poems, Thomas, as seen earlier, says that "fresh imagining" is essential for success (LVW 39). In "Modern Poetry" (1929), a precocious survey of the Georgians and Imagists, the young Thomas says that "the individualism of nearly every poet asserts itself to such an extent that no definite poetic schools can be discerned" (EPW 83). As it was true for the earlier Romantics, so Thomas claims that in the Modern era "no poet can find sure ground; he is hunting for it, with the whole earth perturbed and unsettled about him" (EPW 86). Originality, then, is an almost inescapable condition of poetic composition in the Modern era, for the poet does not feel restrained by any orthodoxy of belief, style, or tradition. Speaking of his own poetic practice, Thomas stresses originality as a laudable goal. Far from accepting the classical doctrine of poetry as either imitation of human action or as moral instruction linked

with delight, Thomas seeks in his poetry an apocalyptic vision: "I do not want to express only what other people have felt; I want to rip something away and show what they have never seen" (SL 24). What attracts us to a poet, he says, is not the poet's ability to imitate the master poets who preceded him; rather, "it's the individuality of the poet . . . that really matters" (SL 124). For this reason, in the late 1930s Thomas once refused to sign the Apocalyptic Manifesto because, he said, "I wouldn't sign any manifesto unless I had written every word of it . . ." (SL 219). For Thomas, a great deal of what he meant by "originality" lay in the individual style of the poet, for only by bringing one's own new associations to old words could originality be achieved. Thomas once reacted gruffly to a remark made by Stephen Spender: "He /Spender/ said in a lecture I saw reported: 'All poets speak the same language.' It is a bloody lie: who talks Spender?" (SL 309). To make one's own, original poetic language, Thomas argues, one has to strip away the traditional feelings and ideas associated with words and then add one's own to the newly purified language. To Pamela Johnson, Thomas writes that "it is part of the poet's job to take a debauched and prostituted word, like the beautiful word 'blond,' and to smooth away the lines of its dissipation, and to put it on the market again, fresh and virgin" (SL 24). In another letter, Thomas links one's experience of the "literal world" of nature to the problem of associationism in language. Just as scientific rationalism has determined the associations that adhere to natural objects, so, Thomas claims, "no single word in all our poetical vocabulary is a virgin word, ready for our first love, ready to be what we make it" (SL 91). Commenting to Vernon Watkins, Thomas describes how he was "strenuously resisting conventional associations" in his poem "There Was A Saviour,"

which depicts Christ as a mental projection rather than as the incarnate son of God (LVW 79). Thomas's most extensive comment on associationism and originality appears in one of his many critiques of Pamela Johnson's poems. Arguing against Miss Johnson's use of a particularly weak adjective, Thomas digresses in order to lay out his theory of the function of the adjective in poetry:

> The thing to remember is that everyone has his different associations for every word; one person may, for some Freudian reason, associate 'mouse' with horrors and death's heads, another with a certain soft material or colour. So the poet who is going to put an adjective before 'mouse' must say to himself: I have two alternatives; either I can create such a tremendous and universal adjective that it will embrace every association built around the word -- that is, it must be an adjective that complies with all the associations from horror to colour; or I must create an adjective that will break down all associations, and make the 'mouse' a new thing with new associations. (EPW 135)

The second of these two alternatives, which Thomas recommends elsewhere, makes for originality. The first alternative is related to the Romantic use of the polysemous metaphor, the metaphor that conducts simultaneously various levels of meaning. Thomas hints that he is aiming at something like the polysemous metaphor in comments on the intensity of his compressed lines: "my lines, all my lines are of the tenth intensity . . . I like contradicting my images, saying two things at once in one word, four in two, and one in six" (SL 122, 151). Whichever associationalist method he practices, Thomas praises or condemns other poets according to the degree of originality their poems display. In his essay on Woods, Thomas criticizes Woods' verse for being "too balanced" in thought and feeling: "what is lacking," he says, "is the warmth of personality, the strange individual glow which lights up everything beautiful enough to be remembered." What he would advise, he says, is that Woods "drop all

traditional fetters and find freedom, and a personal originality," but Woods has committed the sin of having "immersed his personality into the personalities of his masters so completely that he will never again regain it" (EPW 115-17). Similarly, Thomas praises the poet Howard Harris as "original, romantic" (EPW 120), cautions Pamela Johnson to "be yourself in your poetry" (EPW 134), and criticizes John Pudney's book of poems, Open the Sky, for not having as its central image a personal one: "Open the sky most certainly, but the rules of property control even that imperative idealism; it must be the personal image or illusion of the sky, and the sky must be an individual symbol . . . " (EPW 168). Only occasionally does Thomas feel trapped by his insistence on originality and personalism in verse. Apparently, however, he did feel at times that he was trapped in his own "twisted imagination" that produced "too much egocentric poetry" (SL 127). This feeling of being trapped within the self sometimes seemed incapable of being cured: "I write in the only way I can write, & my warped, crabbed & cabinned stuff is not the result of theorizing but of pure incapability to express my needless tortuities in any other way" (SL 130).

Thomas accepted not only the Romantic emphasis on originality but also the emphasis on spontaneity and expressivism as important aspects of the poetic process. The spontaneous and expressivist nature of the poem was, however, balanced by Thomas's concurrent view of the poem in its finished state as a made object. In the letter to Vernon Watkins cited earlier, Thomas, as was noted, chastizes Watkins for writing a poem that lacked an element of spontaneity: "I want a poem," Thomas says, "to do more than just to have the appearance of 'having been created'" (LVW 38). The poet, in Thomas's view, toils at his craft, waiting for that spontaneous impulse that raises craft into art. This

impulse, which Thomas calls an "accidental rush" (LVW 67), is the impetus for each new poem, each of which is one stage in the poet's lifelong quest ("adventure") for unity of being (QEOM 99). In some of his earliest letters, Thomas advises an unqualified spontaneity in composition, as unreflecting pouring out of the contents of the self. He claims that "the faster I write the more sincere I am in what I write" (SL 15) and that should a person "give me a sheet of paper . . . I can't help filling it in" (SL 11). Thomas advises Trevor Hughes to write without premeditation: "write, write, write, out of your guts, out of the sweat on your forehead and the blood in your veins" (SL 14). Similarly, Miss Johnson is urged "to write anything, just to let the words and ideas, the half-remembered half-forgotten images tumble on the sheets of paper" (SL 27). In another letter to Miss Johnson, Thomas distinguishes three stages in the act of composition. He is describing here the wrong way to do it: "First comes the idea of the creation, then the mental poem, then the composition of the music: a wrong method of approach" (EPW 125). Elsewhere, Thomas gives positive advice on how to compose: it should be a process of "selecting your images to suit your particular moods, selecting your thoughts to fit those images" (SL 30). Compared point by point, both of these three-phase processes roughly correspond: music or mood comes first, then images or the mental poem, and last (almost gratuitously) the idea or thoughts. Like Eliot's theory of the objective correlative, Thomas's theory posits a primary, non-rational source of the seed of the poem, usually a subjective emotion calling out for expression, for which images in the objective world are found as correspondents. Rational content remains subordinate and last among the phases. Sometimes Thomas's remarks seem to indicate an almost complete reliance on spontaneity in poetic composition. When asked by a schoolmaster the meaning of

the line "they toil powered with a white music," Thomas is said to have replied, "it simply came into my head, and I think it's the best line I've written."[69] Interviewed by Mark Goulden (who was afraid to publish Thomas's first book for fear no boy of twenty could have written such striking poems), Thomas answered Goulden's question as to how he composed by simply saying "it just flows" (Life 131).

After such remarks as these, it may seem odd that Thomas wrote a letter to Henry Treece complaining of a remark made by Stephen Spender in a review that Thomas seemed to turn his poetry on and off like a water tap. To Treece, Thomas complained: "Spender's remark is really the opposite of what is true. My poems are formed; they are not turned on like a tap at all; they are 'watertight compartments'. Much of the obscurity is due to rigorous compression; the last thing they do is to flow; they are much rather hewn" (SL 196). Thomas reported to others that his poems grew slowly. He once told Pamela Johnson that he labored all day on six lines of a poem, and he told Charles Fisher that he made many drafts of each poem (SL 122, 152). These statements are confirmed by the many extant worksheets of the poems. Vernon Watkins, probably Thomas's closest confidant as a fellow poet, confirms Thomas's statements about his slow, craftsmanlike approach to his art (LVW 17). In addition, David Holbrook has discovered that the strange numbers that appear on many of Thomas's worksheets are cross-references in Roget's Thesaurus; that being so, it is not strange to find that many synonym lists on the same worksheets are directly from Roget's, though as Holbrook admits, Thomas almost never used a Roget's word in the final draft.[70] How can Thomas's call for spontaneity be reconciled with such deliberateness in composition? One explanation is that the poetic composition of the miraculous year 1932-33, during which drafts of almost half of Thomas's

published poems were written, did involve more spontaneity than the composition of poems in later years. However, even early on,Thomas wrote few free verse poems after the 1930 and 1930-32 notebooks. Probably Thomas, like Wordsworth, located the origins of the poem in spontaneous impulse, although such primary "givens" then had to be rigorously shaped into formal poems that embodied the impulses in images correlative to those impulses.

Closely related to Thomas's concern for originality and spontaneity in poetic composition is his equally Romantic tendency to characterize poetry as an expressivist art. To Trevor Hughes, Thomas, as seen earlier, writes that Hughes should "let the mind run . . . spin a lot of sentences out of your guts" (SL 7). In one of his essays in "The Poets of Swansea" series, Thomas directly connects "originality" in poetry with "the brain that has to express itself" in original language (EPW 107). The poet Harris, designated by Thomas as a Romantic, "feels a new sensation, thinks of a new beauty, stretches out his hands for notes to express it . . ." (EPW 120). Miss Johnson, Thomas sadly notes, has employed unoriginal language though "the emotion . . . is worth expressing" (EPW 169). Speaking of his own practice, Thomas admits that he enjoys writing of "my own reactions to emotions," though too much self-expression may lead to revulsion: "the personality-parade of my loud and complex poems" (SL 12, 203). In a less melancholy mood, Thomas refers to his especially self-centered early poems as the "explosive bloodbursts of a boily boy in love with the shape and sound of words, death, unknown love and the shadows on his pillow."[71] In spite of these bloodbursts, Thomas feels that his command of language is too limited to express all that is in him. His words, he says, "are not the words that express what I want to express" (SL 122), a predicament

made poignant by the fact that Thomas feels that "the creation of personal poetry" is "a far higher thing" than a self-limiting, traditionalist verse (SL 60). Of course, by expressing the "self," Thomas, as an inheritor of Romantic values, is simultaneously expressing powers and desires that, though within the self, also go beyond it. Thomas believes that "at the root of our being lies . . . the desire, large as a universe, to express ourselves freely and to the utmost limits of our individual capacities" (SL 93). Applied to poetry, this doctrine may result in the creation of Romantic psychodramas, the projection of warring forces within the psyche onto the landscape or into mythological characters. Thomas seems to be saying that his poems are psychodramas when he writes the following to Henry Treece:

> Very much of my poetry is, I know, an enquiry and a terror of fearful expectation, a discovery and facing of fear. I hold a beast, an angel and a madman in me, and my enquiry is as to their workings, and my problem is their subjugation and victory, downthrow and upheaval, and my effort is their self-expression. (SL 196)

Here is the Romantic myth at work in Thomas's concept of his poetry as involving an internalizing and psychologizing of religious values. His poetry is the expression of the conflict. In fact, one of his definitions of poetry is that poetry is "the rhythmic verbal expression of a spiritual necessity or urge" (PS 104). Donald Hall, in a recent essay in the American Poetry Review, recalls a discussion on poetry with Thomas during one of Thomas's visits to America. As Hall remembers, Thomas felt that "poetry was a dark river flowing down there somewhere; he could send down the bucket any time he wanted, and come up with poetry."[72] Thomas's own metaphor for this process, put forward in his usual self-deprecating mood before a reading, was that of a dredger throwing up "the wordy mud of his own Dead Sea."[73]

However much Thomas emphasizes originality, spontaneity, and expressivism in his letters and critical prose, the poem itself remains for him, when finished, an independent creation, a whole. Thomas often expresses his sense of the wholeness of the created poem by means of organicist analogies, a Romantic practice especially prevalent in Coleridge. Earlier, Thomas's view that words and things should enjoy, ideally, an identical ontological status was discussed. Holding such a view, it is not surprising that Thomas sometimes speaks of words as living entities, organic in themselves. In "Poetic Manifesto" (1951), Thomas describes his original encounter with words: "there they were, seemingly lifeless, made only of black and white, but out of them, out of their own being, came love and terror and pity and pain and wonder . . ." (EPW 155). These words came to the poet in "their spring-like selves, fresh with Eden's dew, as they flew out of the air" (EPW 155). To Watkins, Thomas complains that the phrasing in one of Watkins' poems is "literary," not "living," and calls for poetic language made up of words organic enough to bleed: "I want my sentimental blood . . . the blood of leaves, wells, weirs, fonts, shells, echoes, rainbows, olives, bells, oracles, sorrows" (LVW 38). Thomas wants a "living language" (EPW 178) and insists upon "integrity" and "wholeness" as the important tests for a poem (LVW 66). When the poet leaves his poem, he should leave it with a "self-contained identity" (LVW 67). Such wholeness is achieved during the poetic process, a process that may be described organically. To Watkins, Thomas describes his early poems as being like "flying-fish islands never to be born in again" (LVW 131). Poetry in the ideal should be "as orgiastic and organic as copulation, dividing and unifying . . . propagating" (SL 151). Poetic forms are themselves organic,

and they should "rise out of the words and the expression of them . . . form should never be superimposed" (SL 24). The poet himself is a creator. His poems should "create, not destroy" (SL 21). Though some poets, such as satirists, may be called dissectors of life, Thomas's kind of poet is "a creator and must contribute to life" (EPW 114). A poet's entire poetic development may be seen in terms of a growing organism, as when Thomas says of the poet George Thomas Hood (dead at twenty-three) that "the roots were there, but the tree had not time to grow" (EPW 111). Organic analogies imply that the processes at work in nature are intimately related to the processes at work in the mind of the creative artist. In a letter to Miss Johnson, Thomas discusses the spirit of nature as a god who tells him how to write:

> The chromosomes, the colour bodies that build toward the cells of these walking bodies, have a god in them that doesn't care a damn for the howls of our brains. He's a wise, organic god, moving in a seasonable cycle in the flesh, always setting and putting right what our howls at the astrologers' stars and the destiny of the sun leads us on to. If we listen to him, we're O.K. And he tells me, 'Don't go away now. You stick to your unamiable writings and your never-to-be-popular morbidities. You stick as near as you can to what you love.' (SL 121)

The "howls" of self-consciousness are healed by listening to the voice of the supernatural in nature. Thomas's exhortation to listen to the god of cells should be compared to his earlier remark on his own method of composition: "I think in cells" (SL 84), in which the mind uses for thinking an organism somewhat equivalent to the "word" in language. Thomas often uses, organic, sexual language to describe aspects of the poetic process. In "Author's Prologue," a late poem on poetry, his poems are described as

> seathumbed leaves
> That will fly and fall
> Like leaves of trees (P 3).

Later in the same poem, a poem is described as a "tongued puffball" (P 5), a plant whose thousands of seed-carrying strands may be blown away by a single breath to land and possibly to form new plant life. Not only poems, but also images, the central components of poems, originate in a manner similar to that which produces organisms. Drawing many of his images from the physical body, Thomas describes them in terms of the "progenitors" (SL 47) that produce them. Images are described organically in terms of breeding and seeds in the single most famous statement Thomas ever made on the poetic process as he understood it to occur in himself. Answering Henry Treece's remark that none of Thomas's poems seems governed by a single major image, Thomas explains in reply:

> When you say that I have not Cameron's or Madge's 'concentric movement round a central image', you are not accounting for the fact that it consciously is not my method to move concentrically round a central image. A poem by Cameron needs no more than one image; it moves around one idea, from one logical point to another, making a full circle. A poem by myself needs a host of images, because its centre is a host of images. I make one image -- though 'make' is not the word; I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess -- let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seeds of its own destruction, and my dialectal / sic / method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time.
> . . . What I want to try to explain -- and it's necessarily vague to me -- is that the life in any poem of mine cannot move concentrically round a central image; the life must come out of the centre; an image must be born and die in another; and any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions. I cannot, either -- as Cameron does, and as others do, and this primarily explains his and their writing round the central

> image -- make a poet out of a single motivating experience; I believe in the simple thread of action through a poem, but that is an intellectual thing aimed at lucidity through narrative. My object is, as you say, conventionally, 'to get things straight'. Out of the inevitable conflict of images -- inevitable because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war -- I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem. I do not want a poem of mine to be, nor can it be, a circular piece of experience placed nearly outside the living stream of time from which it came; a poem of mine is, or should be, a watertight section of the stream that is flowing all ways, all warring images within it should be reconciled for that small stop of time. I agree that each of my earlier poems might appear to constitute a section from one long poem; that is because I was not successful in making a momentary peace with my images at the correct moment; images were left dangling over the formal limits, and dragged the poem into another; the warring stream ran on over the insecure barriers, the fullstop armistice was pulled and twisted raggedly on into a conflicting series of dots and dashes. (SL 190-91)

This explanation by Thomas of the poetic process is filled with organicist analogies. The poet awaits the appearance of the seeding image like a woman waiting for her lover ("I let, perhaps, an image be made . . . in me"), the resulting poem being a kind of child produced in the "womb of war." As a body is made of breeding cells, so the poem is made organically by images breeding one another. Since images live, they must also die, containing the "seeds" of destruction, just as sexual reproduction implies the death of the progenitors even as they create new life. Like the generations of men, "an image must be born and die in another" in an ongoing chain limited only by the length of the poem. The images themselves arise out of "the central seed," an organic analogy for imagination, "which is itself destructive and constructive" because it breaks up the rationalist's picture of the outer world in order to recreate that world on its own terms. Thomas calls this my "dialectal method," a phrase which recalls the Romantic dialectic that a primal identity with nature

(thesis) gave way to a dualistic separation (antithesis) and that imagination is to resolve this dualism in a new, higher, more inclusive unity (synthesis). Thomas's dialectic also ends in unity -- "that momentary peace which is a poem" -- and Thomas's lifelong desire to achieve the unity of being associated with the Edenic consciousness and the sensibility of the child shows that the dialectic of images is part of a larger dialectic between self and nature, imagination and the recalcitrant elements in the self. That Thomas considered this long passage a fair statement of his understanding of the poetic process is clear. In a symposium on the film, which took place on 28 October 1953, just one week before he passed into the coma that preceded his death on November 9, Thomas restated briefly his earlier explanation: ". . . a poem comes out . . . one image makes another in the ordinary dialectic process . . . one image breeds another."[74] Again, too, Thomas sees the poem made of words and nature made of things as similar in kind. The world is a flowing stream and the poem also comes from water ("It just flows," he said of his early poetry), only arbitrarily set off from the waters of time by its own finiteness. The finished poem is made of images which have momentarily been reconciled by imagination. The images unite self and world, for they come from nature, yet with the associations peculiar to the single poet. As was seen earlier, Thomas believes that the image should "stir much more than one's visual senses," for the poem fails unless "the spirit illuminates what the eyes have mirrored" (EPW 130-31). The poem's images contain within themselves "the eternal movement . . . the great undercurrent of human grief, folly, pretension, exultation, and ignorance."[75] Poetry is "authentic revelation" (QEOM 168). Hardly removed from nature as the ideal aesthetic poem should be, Thomas's poem is a part of what it reveals: the ongoing stream of things

and time. The authentic revelation that a poem brings, a "peace" (unity of being) after the dialectic of the womb of "war," is a matter of moments, in typical Romantic experience. In spite of all the hard craftsmanship, revisions, and toil that a poet puts into his poems, Thomas still believes in the idea of the crucial moment when inspiration tears away the veils of darkness. To Watkins, Thomas speaks of the "creative rush" or "accidental rush" that transforms the poem-in-process into a unified whole and gives the poet his well-earned "illusionary glowing moment" (LVW 67, 92). Elsewhere, Thomas calls the crucial elements of a true poem "divine accidents" and defines the poet's task as craftsman as that of having "so constructed [the poem] that it is wide open, at any second, to receive the accidental miracle which makes a work of craftsmanship a work of art" (EPW 152). Inspiration, Thomas thinks, informs the highest moments of great art. He praises Edith Sitwell for the "sudden illuminations" and "intensity of emotion" of her poems (EPW 85). In the discussion on film, Thomas says that films contain "a little moment" of poetry, of insight, which makes the film a success: "that always seemed to me the poetry . . . when those moments came."[76] In his short story "Who Do You Wish Was With Us" Thomas associates the "epileptic moment" with an escape from the limitations of the self: "when the legs grow long and sprout into the night and the heart hammers . . . and . . . I felt myself the size of a breathing building" (PA 81). It is interesting to note that in a book review Thomas speculates that Blake, whom Thomas thought the greatest of all poets, "lives because he had a glorious vocabulary, a divine enquiry . . . and possibly epileptic vision" (EPW 177). Certainly Thomas considers the greatest poetry to be made up of moments of visionary insight. In his comments extracted from a BBC panel discussion

and printed as "On Poetry," Thomas speaks of ". . . the magic of poetry . . . the moments of authentic revelation." Poems inevitably contain "worked-upon unmagical passages," but these are only the mundane foundations for "those moments of magical accident" that constitute visionary insight (QEOM 168-69). Reconciling inner and outer, image and idea, body and universe, heart and head, the ideal poem is a "momentary peace" when unity of being replaces for an instant the relentless civil war between the faculties of mind and between the self and the world.

From first to last, Dylan Thomas struggled, as he says the greatest artists should, to reconcile self and world, "my beastly inner and outer" (SL 11). One consequence of this struggle might be aestheticism, the tendency of the self to withdraw into the confines of the poem as beautiful art object. This tendency towards aestheticism tempted Thomas from time to time, especially in the earlier poems. However, Thomas's ultimate allegiance is not to a poetry of withdrawal, with an anti-nature bias, but to an affirmation of life, joy, and love which M. H. Abrams calls the ultimate goal of the subject-object unifying Romantic art.[77]

Undeniably, Dylan Thomas often makes statements about poetry that reveal an innate aesthetic bias. In a very early letter to Trevor Hughes, Thomas says, "I prefer . . . style to life, my own reactions to emotions rather than the emotions themselves" (SL 12). Like Huysmans' Des Esseintes, Thomas, so his wife Caitlin reports, often ". . . described a thing he had never seen, as though it had been with him all the time and there was no need for him to see it" (Leftover 235). Sometimes Thomas says that the sound of a word means more to him than the thematic content. He describes his attitude toward words as that of a sculptor of sounds: "what I like to do is to treat words as a craftsman does his wood

or stone or what-have-you, to hew, carve, mould, coil, polish and plane them into patterns, sequences, sculptures, fugues of sound expressing some lyrical impulse, some spiritual doubt or conviction, some dimly-realised truth I must try to reach and realise" (EPW 155-56). Here is poetry striving toward the condition of music (or thing), fugues of sound, in true Paterian fashion, yet Thomas adds that he hews sounds to express a truth, however obscure. Thomas seems to believe that in the act of composition the poet creates an aesthetic object, yet neither the object nor its intention is anti-natural, nor is the poet haughtily withdrawn into a world of fleeting impressions and private symbols. Thus, Thomas may say that "a poem moves only toward its own end, which is the last line" (SL 196). Yet he consistently rejects the obscurities of surrealism for a poetry that communicates in the normal way to an audience: ". . . every line is meant to be understood; the reader is meant to understand every poem by thinking and feeling about it, and not by sucking it in through his pores" (SL 161). On the one hand, Thomas often writhes at the idea of "interpreting" poetry. Caitlin Thomas reports Thomas's reaction to friends who sought to extract rational content from his early poems:

> . . . if well-meaning friends started an abstruse, intense interpretation of some of Dylan's most obscure lines, which he had long ago forgotten the meaning of himself, it was not long before Dylan was on the floor wrapped up in the carpet, scratching himself, like a flea-bitten hyena, in paroxysms of acute boredom, ending, happily for him, in snoring amnesia. (Leftover 53)

Lawrence Durrell, who knew Thomas fairly well, recounts in an interview debates with Thomas over meaning in a poem: "we used to have slight arguments, because I maintained that poetry should try and say something; Dylan does say something here and there but only intermittently. It's

mostly the colour and the thrash of the words he loves."[78] To another friend, Bert Trick, Thomas says of one of his poems, "your meaning is as good as mine" (Ferris 88). Identifying "the artistic consciousness" with "consciousness of beauty," Thomas says "I can't reconcile life and art" (SL 9). On the other hand, Thomas believes that "the greatest works of art are those that reconcile, perfectly, inner and outer" (SL 10). He criticizes a poem by Vernon Watkins because in the poem "a motive has been rarefied, it should be made common . . . it is a poem so obviously written in words; I want my sentimental blood" (LVW 38). Defending one of his own poems against Watkins' criticism, Thomas speaks of "my own instinctive delight in the muddled world" (LVW 67), not of aesthetic rejection of nature. Although he refuses to include "the weak line" of obvious explanation, transition, or mental rest in one of his own poems (LVW 29), and although he considers "the poetry" in the poem much more crucial than political or ethical opinion expressed therein (EPW 167, 177), he also criticizes himself and others for writing poems that are totally self-contained and non-communicative. Thus, Thomas criticizes one of Pamela Johnson's poems because it "moves in a circle of words and feeling, disregarding itself, and falling, inevitably, into its own pattern . . . the dead ends of the purist lanes" (EPW 133). Thomas is also aware of this aesthetic tendency in his own poems and criticizes himself for it, especially in later years. Even as early as 1936, however, he confides to Watkins his fears: "now I'm almost afraid of all the once-necessary artifices and obscurities, and can't, for the life of me, get any real liberation, any diffusion or dilution or anything, into the churning bulk of words." He fears "the impulse growing like a toenail into the artifice" (SL 171), and, in a moment of self-pity, designates himself "a freak user of words, not a poet" (SL 122). Recognizing a tendency in his

poetry that, in his heart, he really disliked, Thomas fought against aesthetic withdrawal into the world of words. As he complains of his poet-hero in "The Orchards," quoted earlier, "the word is too much with us" (PS 85). Furthermore, in a humorous essay entitled "How to be a Poet, or the Ascent of Parnassus Made Easy," Thomas satirizes "Cedric," the aesthetic poet. Cedric comes to the university, we are told, "known already to the discerning few for his sensitive poems about golden limbs, sun-jewelled fronds, the ambrosia of the first shy kiss in the delicate-traceried caverns of the moon (really the school boot-cupboard), at the threshold of fame and the world laid out before him like a row of balletomanes" (PS 110-11). We are told of Cedric's first book, "Asps and Lutes": "it would be nostalgia for a life that never was. It would be world-weary. (He once saw the world out of a train carriage: it looked unreal)." Quarreling with the college, he vanishes -- "into the Key of Blue" (PS 111). Against the aesthetic view that the poet ought to withdraw as a matter of principle, Thomas seems to have felt that the poet, in Wordsworth's phrase, should bring relationship and love. In answer to the New Verse questionnaire, "as a poet what distinguishes you . . . from an ordinary man," Thomas replies, "only the use of the medium of poetry to express the causes and forces which are the same in all men" (EPW 150). In the same series of answers, Thomas also calls for any political revolution that would result in "a communal art" (EPW 150). Thomas's definition of poetry as a series of infinite moments captured in images also includes the idea of the poet as a bringer of relationship. Readers, says Thomas, respond ". . . to the magic of poetry, to the moments, that is, of authentic revelation, of the communication, the sharing, at its highest level, of personal experience" (QEOM 158; Thomas's italics). Apparently, the many who attended Thomas's four famous reading

tours in America felt the same. John Malcolm Brinnin, Thomas's host and chronicler during these visits, cites a review in the Boston Herald of one of Thomas's readings: "here was one of the leading talents of our day (exhibiting a warm personality as well) combined with the most soaring words ever written, communicating not as /a/ figure in grease-paint, but in the best sense of Wordsworth's conception of a poet -- a man speaking to other men" (DTA 167). To these reports may be added Thomas's assertion in his famous poem on poetry, "In My Craft Or Sullen Art," that he writes

> Not for the proud man apart
> From the raging moon . . .
> . . . . . .
> But for the lovers, their arms
> Round the griefs of the ages,
> Who pay no praise or wages
> Nor heed my craft or art. (P 197)

In fact, Thomas's experiences as a BBC broadcaster and public speaker of Modern poetry seem to have played a large part in his struggle for clarity of expression. In an interview with students at the University at Utah, Thomas responded to the question as to whether the poet should consciously confuse his readers:

> It is impossible to be too clear. I am trying for more clarity now. At first I thought it enough to leave an impression of sound and feeling and let the meaning seep in later, but since I've been giving these broadcasts and reading other men's poetry as well as my own, I find it better to have more meaning at first reading.[79]

Even in his early poems, however, as Walford Davies claims, there is a very obvious and weighty thematic content.[80] In any case, as the lines from "In My Craft" make clear, Thomas seems to feel that the poet does offer relationship and love, yet he knows well that the poet is a solitary, estranged from those (the lovers) whom he would make recipients of his love. In the prose "Note" to Collected Poems, Thomas says that "these

poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God" (CP xiii). Yet one of his most poignant figures of the poet is that of the hunchback in "The Hunchback in the Park," tormented and ridiculed by the boys as he contemplates a Muse figure drawn in the mind. This conflict between the poet as praiser of man and God, the bringer of relationship and love, and the poet as isolated, self-conscious exile is the next important Romantic trait to be considered.

Any poet who perceives that he is estranged from the external world, from human society, or from nature, may experience a crisis in self-consciousness. His heightened sense of his own poetic self in isolation from man and nature, and his difficulty in moving beyond himself as the major subject of his poetry, may create in him vacillating states of exultation or dejection as the poetic self either drives toward imaginative autonomy or seeks convergence with the outer world. Thomas's short story "The Peaches" contains a famous passage which describes the young poet-hero's happy self-consciousness in the fields of a country farm in Wales:

> On my haunches, eager and alone, casting an ebony shadow, with the Gorsehill jungle swarming, the violent, impossible birds and fishes leaping, hidden under four-stemmed flowers the height of horses, in the early evening in a dingle near Carmarthen, my friend Jack Williams invisibly near me, I felt all my young body like an excited animal surrounding me, the torn knees bent, the bumping heart, the long heat and depth between the legs, the sweat prickling in the hands, the tunnels down to the eardrums . . . the blood racing, the memory around and within flying, jumping, swimming and waiting to pounce. There, playing Indians in the evening, I was aware of me myself in the exact middle of a living story, and my body was my adventure and my name. I sprang with excitement and scrambled up through the scratching brambles again. (PA 11-12)

Here, self-awareness and immersion of the self in nature, the animal body, and spontaneous art ("the exact middle of a living story") converge in boyhood happiness that recalls Wordsworth's lines in "Tintern Abbey": ". . . my boyish days / And their glad animal movements all gone by" (ll. 73-4). In a post-war BBC broadcast, "The Crumbs of One Man's Year," Thomas describes an older man (himself) taking delight in the cultivation of self-consciousness during a late summer walk:

> I was walking, one afternoon in August, along a river-bank, thinking the same thoughts that I always think when I walk along a river-bank in August. As I was walking, I was thinking -- now it is August and I am walking along a river-bank. I do not think I was thinking of anything else. I should have been thinking of what I should have been doing, but I was thinking only of what I was doing then and it was all right: it was good, and ordinary, and slow, and idle, and old, and sure, and what I was doing I could have been doing a thousand years before, had I been alive then and myself or any other man. (QEOM 44)

These delights of self-inspection are the subject of many of Thomas's poems, especially the earlier ones; equally certain, the burdens of self-consciousness afflicted Thomas throughout his life both as man and poet. In some of his earliest letters, Thomas speaks of "the horribly argumentative, contradictory nature of my mind" (SL 11). He complains that "it's self, self, all the time," a "fatal self-consciousness" that obstructs the articulation of strategies for recovering unity of being" (SL 12, 48). As a poet, Thomas wishes aloud that he may be "informed with a new wonder, empty of all my old dreariness, and rid of the sophistication which is disease" (SL 84). Such desire for imaginative recovery, however, appears less frequently in the letters than various complaints about the "personality parade" (SL 203) of the poems, his "horrible self" (SL 219) and his "passion for self-glorification" (SL 382), especially as a result of his acceptance in America as the archetype of the Romantic Bard. As

Thomas tells Daniel Jones in the famous letter from Ireland, it is a "dog-eaten self-consciousness" (MFDT 41) that accompanies Thomas's frantic search for a way to explain the rift between interior and exterior worlds. Towards the end of his life, Thomas may have reversed his view of the living body in "The Peaches" cited above. To R. B. Marriott he is reported to have said, "to be able to tear off my flesh, to get rid of this awful, horrifying skin we have, to get at the bone and then to get rid of that! What a wonderful thing!" (Ferris 113). This sense of the deathliness of the animal self appears again in a dream described by Thomas to Leo Abse. In the dream, a man quests through a series of caves inside a mountain descending ever deeper into the center. At the center of the deepest cave, he sees a skeleton of himself and falls to his death (Ferris 225). Whether a real dream or another one made up for effect, the dream describes the untransformable, recalcitrant self that brings death to the questing poetic self.

The trials of self-consciousness afflict not only the poet but also his relationship to the external world, to others and to nature. An extraordinary passage in a 1933 letter to Trevor Hughes describes the feeling of being cut off from sympathy with his dying aunt, Ann Jones:

> Telegrams, dying aunts, cancer, especially of such a private part as the womb, distraught mothers and unpremeditated train journeys, come rarely. They must be savoured properly and relished in the right spirit . . . She loved me quite inordinately . . . She writes -- is it, I wonder, a past tense yet -- regularly . . . But the foul thing is I feel utterly unmoved . . . And yet I like -- liked her. She loves -- loved me. Am I, he said with the diarist's unctuous, egotistic preoccupation with his own blasted psychological reactions to his own trivial affairs, callous and nasty? Should I weep? Should I pity the old thing? For a moment I feel I should. There must be something lacking in me. (SL 11)

Unlike Joyce's fingernail-paring, God-like artist, Thomas regrets his self-conscious isolation from human sympathy for his aunt. Elsewhere, not a dying aunt but a beautiful young girl evokes in the poet the sense of estrangement from love. In Thomas's unfinished novel of a young poet's initiation into London life, Sam Bennet finds himself in a bathroom with a willing girl named Polly:

> . . . He did not feel any emotion at all. O God, he thought, make me feel something, make me feel as I ought to, here is something happening and I'm cool and dull as a man in a bus. Make me remember all the stories. I caught her in my arms, my heart beat against hers, her body was trembling, her mouth opened like a flower. The lotus of Osiris was opening to the sun.
>
> "Listen to the old birds," she said, and he saw that the hot water was running over the rim of the washbasin.
>
> I must be impotent, he thought. (AST 31)

Not only do other people seem unreal at times, but public values as well, such as the call to arms in World War II. Of the possibility of being drafted, Thomas remarked, "I hope I shall have enough cynicism to carry me through, but all I can feel are personal loves and hates" (TML 17). Having identified his old sophistication as disease, Thomas describes the feeling that nature has lost its wonder as a perversion that results from the disease of self-consciousness:

> . . . Now there is nothing on God's earth that is, in itself, an ugly thing; it is the sickness of the mind that turns a thing sick and the dirtiness of the mind that turns a thing dirty . . . A dead body promises the earth as a live body promises its mate; and the earth is our mate. Looking on one dead, we should say, there lies beauty, for it has housed beauty, the soul being beautiful . . . What has this to do with a resolution? It leads me to resolve that I shall never take things for granted, but that I shall attempt to take them as they are, that nothing is ugly except what I make ugly, and that the lowest and the highest are level to the eyes of the air. (SL 82-3)

It is "the faults in oneself," Thomas claims, that are falsely blamed on "things that go squawk in the night" (SL 89). To get outside the limitations of the self ("to change our angles of perspective") is to see nature as supernatural, to imagine foghorns calling to ships in the Bristol Channel "as an albatross might have cried to the ancient mariner" (SL 85). Under the same sea, Thomas imagines, the human and the natural might be one (the figure of a merman) and materialism (the rationalist-magnate's view of nature) might be destroyed: "I should like to be somewhere very wet, preferably under the sea, green as a merman, with cyclamine crabs on my shoulders, and the skeleton of a commercial magnate floating, Desdemona-wise, past me" (SL 85).

Finally, Thomas wrestles with the problem of self-consciousness as it relates both to the making of poetry and to the role of the poet as exile, outcast, wanderer, or hero, seer, his own redeemer. As demonstrated earlier, Thomas believes in the internal quest into the self in search of paradise, Jordan, unity of being. He defines the creation of personal poetry as the greatest art, and he defines his own self-expressive poetry as a psychodrama involving a beast, an angel, and a madman. At the same time, the cultivation of a poetic self that might transcend the habitual self may degenerate into a kind of bitter, reductive egotism. Thus, Thomas warns against the "twisted imagination" that produces "too much egocentric poetry" (SL 127). The poet of the twisted imagination is Thomas's "freak user of words" (SL 122), his poem an ingrowing toenail of self-reflecting words, private rather than both personal and universal. In his criticism of other poets, Thomas often notes the struggle to overcome an imprisoning subjectivity. Of the Welsh poet Llewelyn Pritchard, Thomas writes that "he seemed to create in his poetry an impersonal attitude, to break down the remorseless introspection that sent

his mind fluttering on the edge of insanity" (EPW 103). Here, surely, is the problem of subject-object relations, the subjective poet's striving for an objectivity that includes, not denies, his own subjectivity. In similar fashion, Thomas writes of John Clare's poetry: "what is remarkable, under these conditions, is that the best of Clare becomes both social and universal poetry, and that, even at his worst, he had none of the private, masturbatory preoccupation of the compulsive egoist" (EPW 179). The Romantic universality that, as Thomas says, proceeds out of a poetry of self that is personal but not private remained for him a goal: "One day I hope to write something . . . larger, wider, more comprehensible, and less selfcentred" (SL 79). But keeping the "personal" from drifting into the "private" remained a constant problem for Thomas. In his satirical novel co-authored with John Davenport, The Death of the King's Canary, Thomas/Davenport describes the alternatives of isolation or false communion that present themselves to the aging poet Julian Greensleaves:

> . . . these were the unpleasant practical jokes of a dated man out of love, but he would not part with them. There was nothing to take their place but the terrible monotony of the working intellect, the groans and self-whippings, the false flashes and sterile wastes of exhibitionist creation, the slow death of 'being together', the dungeons of being alone. (Canary 120)

This description seems to be true as well of Dylan Thomas, who, speaking of poetic creation, says that "there is a prophet in pain, an oracle in the agony of the mind" (SL 90). The agony of vacillation between a poetry of Romantic self-aggrandizement or the equally Romantic searching for grounds for objectivity extends also Thomas's views on the poet. Exiled or estranged from society, he may still bring relationship and love, still function as a seer, hero of his own poems.

Self-styled "the Rimbaud of Cwmdonkin Drive" (LVW 104) after his parents' home at No. 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, Thomas often adopts the Romantic belief, and sometimes the pose, of the artist as exile from the rituals and values of society. Concomitant with the artist's status as exile is the belief in the artist as hero, prophet, or seer in his own poems. In Thomas's recently discovered 1935 letter to Daniel Jones, Thomas describes the artist's interior world as a place of refuge from the exterior world: "Here in Ireland I'm further away than ever from the permanent world, the one real world in a house or a room, very much peopled, with the exterior, wrong world -- wrong because it's never understood out of the interior world -- looking in through the windows . . . so the only world for that WARMDANDYLANLEY-MAN must be the WARMDANDYLANLEY-WORLD under the world-of-the others" (MFDT 41). As Jones surmises, Thomas lived his whole life as an exile in the "world-of-the-others," though Thomas struggled to reconcile inner and outer worlds -- the task, Thomas says, of the consummate artist (SL 10). As a young poet in the provincial city of Swansea, Thomas undoubtedly felt like an artistic exile among the Welsh puritans. He speaks of his composer friend Daniel Jones and himself as "artistic Ishmaels" (SL 5) whose ennui after too much drink and sex separates them from the others: "Our lowest feelings when we sit drunk, maudlin, holding a whore's hand, are the highest feelings of the maggoty men around us (SL 5). Announcing the death of God, the young poet associates himself with the first rebel, Lucifer: "Now the Old Boy reigns, with a red-hot pincers for a penis . . . like a devil too, I wave my pincers at the stars" (SL 6). Thomas also told Pamela Johnson that "Dylan" meant "the prince of darkness" (SL 23). Late in life, Thomas delighted in reading the part of Satan in a BBC broadcast of Paradise Lost (Ferris 213). Thomas seldom felt that it was part of the poet's duty to uphold any social or political opinion in his poetry, for

to do so would endanger his status as an exile. Writing from Ringwood, Thomas says that he is living "where the English romantic outlaw is at his loudest in praise of characters and soil," and he rejects the political poetry of Spender and Auden as later, during World War II, he rejected the idea that artists should be drafted (SL 282). Paul Ferris discovered that Mervyn Levy, a young Swansea artist and early London roommate of Thomas, used to sing Thomas to sleep with a song called "I am the bandolero"; Thomas loved best the line "For I am waiting and watching, an outlaw defiant" (Ferris 122). To Watkins in 1938, Thomas writes of his status as exile and the temptations of respectability: "I have been . . . in doubt as to whether I should continue as an outlaw or take my fate for a walk in the straight and bowler-treed paths. The conceit of outlaws is a wonderful thing; they think they can join the ranks of regularly-conducted society whenever they like" (LVW 37). Daniel Jones recently reported a question he put to Thomas that further reinforces the view that Thomas accepted the role of exile. Jones explains: "When I put to Dylan the conundrum: 'Which would you rather be, the scum of the cream or the cream of the scum?' he invariably replied (as Satan in Paradise Lost replied in other words), 'The cream of the scum'" (MFDT 115n.). By the end of his life, possibly as a result of the easy success of his public readings in America, Thomas may have felt that he was betraying his young, outlaw self for quick money. To Brinnin in New York in 1950 Thomas described himself as "found and humble," wishing he were again "lost and proud" as he was in his youth" (DTA 32). In 1952, after many further readings, he described his activity in America as a debased "peddling and bawling to adolescents the romantic agonies of the dead" (SL 381). Obviously, Thomas as a public phenomenon filled some sort of need for a Romantic figure, as Ferris

argues (Ferris 312), yet long before he was famous Thomas styled himself as The Poet, as his friend Glyn Jones reported (Ferris 117). Caitlin Thomas has said that in their early married life Thomas refused even to think of getting a job, being the "absolute poet" (Life 254). Both of Thomas's major biographers, FitzGibbon and Ferris, have cited Thomas's description of the Welsh poet Llewelyn Prichard as uncannily identical to Thomas's own nature as a poet (Life 92; Ferris 74):

> No one can deny that the most attractive figures in literature are always those around whom a world of lies and legends has been woven, those half mythical artists whose real characters become cloaked for ever under a veil of the bizarre. They become known not as creatures of flesh and blood, living day by day as prosaically as the rest of us, but as men stepping on clouds, snaring a world of beauty from the trees and sky, half wild, half human.
>
> It is, on the whole, a popular and an entertaining fallacy. But Llewelyn Prichard was a genuine figure of fancy. The gaunt wide-eyes poet with the wax nose, might have stepped from the pages of a romanticist's diary. His life, strange and disordered, as poet, artist, and strolling player, trembling on the verge of disease, one foot in the grave and the other in the work house, needs no glossing over. With Prichard, eccentricity was no pose; it was not bestowed upon him by contemporaries; it was ingrained in man.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He failed to be great, but he failed with genius.
>
> (EPW 102-03, 106)

Thomas himself called Modern poets "still very romantic persons [who] still want to 'get away from it all' and find a kind of heaven on earth" (EPW 161). In "Return Journey," a 1947 BBC broadcast about going back to one's home town after many years away, the narrator asks around Swansea for the whereabouts of the young Dylan Thomas, poet: ". . . a bombastic adolescent Bohemian with a thick-knotted artist's tie made out of his sister's scarf . . . a gabbing, ambitious, mock-tough, pretentious young man" (QEOM 76). Another self-satirizing portrait of the artist as a "Romantic" figure appears in The Death of The King's Canary. There,

Thomas's parody of himself, the Welsh poet Owen Tudor, is seen sailing in a drunken boat or is said to be likely to end his days "in an aeroplane flying to an unknown destination" -- both parodies of the Romantic quest (Canary 52). In an early short story, "The Mouse and the Woman," the poet-hero in the guise of the prodigal son describes his Alastor-like quest for love in more serious terms: "'Father,' he said, 'I have been walking over the world, looking for a thing worthy to love, but I drove it away and go now from place to place, moaning my hideousness, hearing my own voice in the voices of the corncrakes and the frogs, seeing my own face in the riddled faces of the beasts'" (PS 71). As a badge of his exile, the artist may be ill or mad, somehow not conforming with notions of normality in body or in mind. In his early letters, Thomas often poses as ill in conscious imitation of Keats. FitzGibbon notes that as a schoolboy Thomas took Keats as a measuring stick, telling his mother he would be "as great as Keats if not better" (Life 65). Furthermore, as both FitzGibbon and Ferris note, Thomas sold his notebooks (from which he drew most of the poems in his first two books and some in his third) at the same age as Keats was when he died (Life 281; Ferris 177), an event whose significance must have been obvious to Thomas. By the end of his life, Thomas said to John Davenport that he had had twice the time to write that Keats had had and now could find little strength to go on (Life 281). Although by the end of his life he was truly ill, as a young man he struck the pose of the "damned," young poet. In a letter to Trevor Hughes, Thomas wrote that "the majority of literature is the outcome of ill men, and, though you might not know it, I am always ill" (SL 7). Even writing poetry is itself "an incurable disease" while the poet courts death by drink -- "I still sedulously pluck the flower of alcohol" (SL 8) -- and tuberculosis -- "Cough! cough!

cough! my death is marching on" (SL 45). At nineteen, Thomas claimed that "a misanthropic doctor . . . has given me four years to live" (SL 52), which shows how much Thomas was drawn to the Keatsian type. Daniel Jones, one of Thomas's two closest friends, reported that Thomas once coughed blood into a handkerchief, claiming it was a symptom of tuberculosis, and said, "I shall never see fifty." The cough, from smoking, and the blood, from a self-induced rupture of a blood vessel in the throat, were actually acquired as part of the pose (MFDT 47). If poets must be ill, they may also be mad. Thomas once claimed that great poets "make a perfect fusion of madness and sanity" (SL 87). More significantly, he wrote an essay as a newspaper reporter in 1933 entitled "Genius and Madness Akin in World of Art" (EPW 122-24). Thomas makes the usual point that creativity and insanity often appear in close proximity to one another and certainly eccentricity appears quite frequently in great writers. One point worthy of notice is that except for John Donne and Nina Hamnett, all of Thomas's examples of the eccentricities of genius come from the latter part of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth. These writers include Blake, Swinburne, Wilde, Keats, Poe, Clare, Verlaine, and Baudelaire.

So far, according to Thomas, the poet may suffer from self-consciousness, a sense of estrangement from the external world; he may be an exile or an outlaw; and he may be damned by disease or madness. The poet may also, however, be a hero in spite of these impediments. As seen in the discussion of Thomas's poetics, Thomas describes the poet's function as the stripping away of darkness to let in light, the sharing of personal experience of authentic revelation, the fusion of inner and outer worlds by the magic and the miracles of poetry. As a poet, Thomas calls himself

a middle-class, beardless Walt, a poet in the path of Blake, a writer from words like Shelley and Rossetti, and a lifelong, conscious competitor with Keats. In addition, we have seen that for Thomas the poet is his own Christ -- "God help our godheads if we can't play Christ," he said (SL 5). The poet resurrects the dead flesh into living flesh in his images, words that can open the gates to heaven. The process of poetic creation is painful, but there is a prophet in pain, an oracle in the agony of the mind. Looking on nature as language, the poet translates the words and codes of the universe, simultaneously translating his own words into living things. With such power and such tasks, the poet may claim a proud autonomy: "There is no necessity for the artist to do anything. There is no necessity. He is a law unto himself" (SL 24). The poet may be an "orpheus of the storm" (SL 417) or "one of the dark-eyed company of Poe and Thompson, Nerval and Baudelaire, Rilke, and Verlaine" (SL 15). He may purify the whole world, "one of the white-faced company whose tears wash the world" (SL 16). Like the poets of World War I who "built towers of beauty upon the ashes of their lives" (EPW 85), the poet may actually die, like Christ, so that others might live through the poems he writes out of his dying. In a post-war broadcast, "Wilfred Owen" (1946), Thomas describes the poet as his own priest, his own church, his poems ringing like bells out of the broken tower of the body:

> He buries his smashed head with his own singed hands,
> and is himself the intoning priest over the ceremony,
> the suicide, the sunset. He is the common touch. He
> is the bell of the church of the broken body. (QEOM 102)

Remarkably similar to Hart Crane's metaphor in "The Broken Tower" (1933), Thomas's metaphor also depicts the poet as having shattered himself to create his poems. In a different metaphor, Theodore Roethke makes the same

point about Thomas's self-destroying procedure in poetic creation: ". . . he drank his own blood, ate of his own marrow, to get at some of that material."[81] Thomas makes a similar point in his poem "This Bread I Break," wherein the process of poetic creation is one with the transubstantiation of Christ's body and blood. In any case, Thomas's view of The Poet, both in his general belief and personal conduct, is consistent with various strains within the Romantic tradition. Also consistent with Romantic belief is Thomas's concern with the figure of the child as a symbol of unity of being.

Thomas's closest friends and his two major biographers all testify to Thomas's fascination with the figure of the child (or sometimes the figures of the boy and the adolescent poet). Daniel Jones reports that only childhood remained for Thomas as an ideal state of existence:

> The only ideal he clung to was an ideal possible to achieve only in childhood: the child-life itself. He wished to remain as a child, not to grow up, not to have to face 'realities', to be cosy, shut the world out, live from day to day, always with new 'excitements', clamouring like a child, 'What shall we do next? What shall we do next? All this hovered before his mind like a mirage, and he was sick with nostalgia for the days when he was 'young and easy'. (MFDT 110)

What Jones calls Thomas's "fetch" or false public personality of the drunken clown was only a mask for the real Thomas who struggled all his life to regain the Edenic state of consciousness associated with a childhood undivided into man and nature, reason and imagination, desire and reality. Thomas's other close friend, Vernon Watkins, who understood Thomas the poet as well as Jones understood Thomas the man, attributes Thomas's poems of childhood as an Edenic state to the horrors Thomas witnessed during the bombings of World War II. The evocation of an Edenic childhood, Watkins argues, was an effort of the imagination to fend

off or transform the terrible realities of the external world:

> Surely it was the intervening horror, the impact of war, particularly the London air raids, on his appalled and essentially tragic vision, that restrained him / from finishing his satirical novel, Adventures in the Skin Trade /. Nothing less than the truth would now satisfy him. With his precise visionary memory he was able to reconstruct out of joy the truth of his childhood, both in his poems and in his late stories and broadcast scripts, for those experiences were real . . . the pressure of the anarchy of war itself and the vision of distorted London had taken the place of his half-fictional vision and compelled his imagination forward to "Ceremony After a Fire Raid," and to the beautiful poems evoking childhood, "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill." (AST xii-xiii)

Watkins seems right in finding Thomas's childhood poems symbolic of a state of being rather than simply regressive, psychotic yearnings for mother and the womb. Walford Davies makes a similar point to Watkins', that the childhood poems "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October" are also war poems and take their ultimate significance from the context of terrible destruction as do Eliot's Four Quartets. Seeing both poets' images of the child as "the most pregnant and consistent image for the sense of purpose in pointless flux," Davies argues that "the evocation of childhood is something altogether sterner and more intelligent" than escapist nostalgia.[82] Even David Holbrook, though he is severely criticizing Thomas as immature, identifies the childhood poems as struggles to regain a sense of unity of being:

> Many of Thomas's poems are expressions of nostalgia for pre-puberty, before the problems of dissociated identity made life intolerable. Some of his best poems reflect nostalgia for this stage, and even for an earlier time while his mother still managed to maintain him in a state of not being disillusioned -- so that he could continue to impose inner on outer reality in the infantile way, and control it by magic.[83]

Like Davies and Holbrook, currently Thomas's chief defender and detractor, Thomas's biographers try to distinguish the poet's use of the image of

the child from the man's psychological make-up. FitzGibbon speaks of "Dylan's nostalgia for the past, for that lost paradise of innocence" and notes that Thomas "seldom wrote . . . about any other subject than himself as a boy or as a very young man" (Life 257). Still, FitzGibbon adds, in Thomas's post-war childhood poems the poet's longing for a state of unity of being is an "emotion . . . of far greater complexity, and nostalgia itself becomes an inadequate word with which to describe it" (Life 258). Less sympathetically, Paul Ferris calls childhood one of Thomas's "safe places," like warm beds and motherhood, that reflects an inability or unwillingness to accept adulthood (Ferris 193, 39). Thomas himself is quoted as having once said that "there's only one thing that's worse than having an unhappy childhood, and that's having a too-happy childhood" (Ferris 49). In some lecture notes prepared for delivery during his American tours, Thomas admits that his own childhood has so informed his work that it has taken on a status independent from its roots in his own biography: "I've written so much and talked so much . . . of my dull but cramful childhood and my youth in the turbulent doldrums, that they have become to me like the childhood and youth of somebody quite else" (Ferris 239). In other words, Thomas has transformed the happiest moments of his early life into symbols, especially in the poems, where childhood is much closer to the Romantic symbol than the more realistic stories of childhood and youth in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog. Postponing the discussion of the child figures in the poems to a later chapter, we may here examine some of Thomas's BBC broadcasts and other prose writings that deal with childhood and memory in less complex but generally similar fashion to that of the poems.

Thomas wrote once, in a series of verse captions for pictures of

winter scenes, of "owl-tongued childhood" (D&D 207), thus associating the bird of wisdom with a state of being -- like Wordsworth's "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!" of the Intimations Ode. Like Wordsworth, too, Thomas knew his own childhood as a passing phase of being that could never actually be returned to though it could be evoked in memory and might exist as a model of what some higher state of being, incorporating childhood vision and its dissolution in adulthood, might be. Thus, in a review of Walter de la Mare's books on childhood, Thomas speaks of seeing through the eyes of a child "the astonishing systems, the unpredictable order, of life on the edge of its answer or quivering on a poisonous threshold"; and he identifies de la Mare's subject in his stories of childhood as "the imminence of spiritual danger" (QEOM 109, 111). Here is the Romantic child, a unified sensibility, yet exposed by time to the inevitable fall into self-consciousness and division that marks the Romantic version of the expulsion from Eden. This Edenic consciousness, then, is what Thomas associates with childhood and what he seeks to recover in his late poems on childhood. As mentioned earlier, one of Thomas's last recorded remarks before his death dealt with returning to the Garden of Eden and unconsciousness; his last planned work, an opera with Stravinsky, was to deal with the emergence of a second Eden and Adam after a nuclear holocaust to come. Even in one of Thomas's unfinished filmscripts, Twenty Years A-Growing, Thomas chose a subject that involves a man's decision to live on the islands associated with a childhood close to nature rather than to abandon that island-world for "the outer world" of mainland Ireland, the world of "adult" values. In a scene in which the young Maurice and his grandfather visit one of the oldest of the Blasket Islands, an abandoned ancestral home, the grandfather's prediction that one day these islands will be deserted is linked

with the child Maurice:

> GRANDFATHER'S VOICE: . . . the young will go and the old will be left. And after the old are dead and are on the way to truth, there will be no more fishing nor hunting nor fowling on the island and and all will be in ruin . . .
>
> We are in the churchyard half way through the grandfather's words, by the old chapel. The two men and the boy are standing in the middle of the churchyard. Above the ruin is a cross.
>
> THE GRANDFATHER (softly) Maybe it will come that all the little islands, all the little places where men do make a livelihood together out of the gathering of the strand and the hunt of the hill and the fish of the sea will be empty and forgotten . . .
>
> MAURICE I shall stay on the island . . .
>
> THE GRANDFATHER (smiling) You will be most lonely, for you will be the only one . . . Come now, let us go down to the little house . . .
>
> And they move away out of the darkening churchyard. (TYA 82)

In a prose synopsis of the unfinished second half of the filmscript, Thomas emphasizes the island: childhood/mainland analogy. Thomas says that at the wake for the dead grandfather, Maurice begins to pass from childhood to adolescence, "and we see the life of the island for the last time through a child's eyes." On the way to the churchyard, Thomas continues, Maurice will realize "that a part of him, too, died that night: a whole, deep part of his life: his childhood" (TYA 89). Later, an Englishman from the mainland comes to the island to lure the young Maurice away from childhood: "the man . . . introduces into the idyllic timelessness of the island the first sign of the time-bound outer world and the first suggestion of adult responsibility" (TYA 90). Eventually, Maurice must choose either to leave the island to follow his love Mauraid to America or to accompany the Englishman to the "outer world" of work and money. Remembering, however, his grandfather, ". . . the enduring

figure, the eternal peasant," Maurice, unlike Luke in Wordsworth's Michael, does not leave the ancestral acres: ". . . Maurice remains upon the island. He faces poverty, privation, labour and loneliness; he faces a life without Mauraid and without help; but he is sure" (TYA 91). Clearly, the "split" between island and mainland resembles the split between subject and object, child and adult, in Romantic thought.

This sort of association of geography with states of being also exists in Thomas's BBC broadcasts about his childhood and youth in Swansea. Actually, these broadcasts are personal essays -- autobiographical, nostalgic, evocative, the creations of imagination and memory. Their distinguishing traits are an emphasis on important moments strung together in long catalogues and an emphasis on unity of being as experienced by the child whose consciousness consists of these moments. Psychological change, the "fall" into adult self-consciousness, determines the then/now structure of these essays in comparison. The unanswered but constantly present question is the central question of Romantic experience: I who was once unified am now divided -- what can I do to regain unity of being or else to attain a more complex unity at a higher level of synthesis?

The earliest of Thomas's broadcasts of childhood and youth is "Reminiscences of Childhood" (1943), extant in two versions (I,II). As is true, as we shall see, of the two versions of poems like "The Hunchback in the Park" and "After the Funeral," here too Thomas's revisions tend to minimize mundane or rational explanations of events for visionary, imaginative ones. In "Reminiscences" (I) Thomas speaks of the problem of self and world for the young Thomas who lived at No. 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, next to Cwmdonkin Park, in the cliffside Uplands area of Swansea. Thomas describes his childhood in terms of "worlds,"

circles within circles of consciousness, rippling outwards from the self. First, there was the child; then, the sea town ("my world"); between these two, the park ("a world within the world of the sea town"); and finally, outside these central circles, Wales ("a strange Wales"), London, and "The Front" (QEOM 1). Thomas's "front" was only the porch to the house of the park where he hunted birds with a wooden rifle. The park itself was one of the young Thomas's two important contacts with nature, the other being his relatives' farm Fernhill. In "Reminiscences" (I) Thomas associates both the beginning of love and poetic creation with the park (QEOM 4), which, as a symbol of Eden or Edenic consciousness is called "the eternal park" (QEOM 7), or, in revision, "the everlasting park" (QEOM 14). In both versions of "Reminiscences" Thomas includes as part of the text his poem "The Hunchback in the Park," based upon the old park-keeper whom Thomas knew as a boy, but transformed in the poem into a figure of the Romantic poet. Like the young Thomas, the hunchback is imaginatively inspired to creation in the landscape of the park. An outcast by his external deformity, he is identified with the natural rhythms and cycles of the park ("Like the park birds he came early, / Like the water he sat down); and though victimized by youths associated with urban life and its evils ("the truant boys of the town"), he creates in his mind an ideal Muse figure of imagination, after darkness engulfs the park and town, the hunchback-artist finds refuge, or as Thomas says in prose, "the hunchback sat alone, with images of perfection in his head" (QEOM 6). Nature, love, and poetic imagination are thus associated not only with one another but with the figure of the child who perceived the park as Eden and the hunchback as artist, with the older boy who experienced love and imaginative awakening himself there, and finally with memory out of which

the mature poet's imagination fashions its own past. Thomas knew that his perception of the park ("that small, iron-railed universe"; QEOM 3) grew with his own imagination: "And that park grew up with me; that small world widened as I learned its secrets and boundaries, as I discovered new refuges and ambushes in the woods and jungles; hidden homes and lairs for the multitudes of imagination . . ." (QEOM 12). He also knew that the details of memory represent crucial epiphanic moments of insight, welling up from the unconscious mind like fish out of the ocean:

> The recollections of childhood have no order; of all those every-coloured and shifting scented shoals that move below the surface of the moment of recollection, one, two, indiscriminately, suddenly, dart up out of their revolving waters into the present air; immortal flying-fish. (QEOM 6)

It is significant that Thomas elsewhere uses the same organic metaphor of flying fish to describe the poems of a very young poet. To Watkins, Thomas writes that "one's first poems in adolescence seemed, to one, like flying-fish islands" (LVW 131). Poems, then, like memories, are moments of insight, the images welling up from the dark river of the unconscious just as reminiscences well up from memory. In fact, Thomas defined poetry on one occasion as "memorable words-in-cadence which move and excite me emotionally" (my italics).[84] Inevitably, if memories and poems can fly, so can poets, as Thomas demonstrates at the end of "Reminiscences." There, Thomas the man imagines Thomas the child, free as recollected moments or poems, flying over the Swansea of his youth. Doing so, the flying boy causes a piano teacher's metronome to break, so "there is no more Time" (QEOM 7). Here, at the end of the two versions of "Reminiscences," is the greatest difference between them. At the end of "Reminiscences" (I), Thomas undercuts the boy's imaginative flight

with a "realistic" disclaimer:

> This is only a dream. The ugly, lovely, at least to me, town is alive, exciting and real though war has made a hideous hold in it. I do not need to remember a dream. The reality is there. The fine, live people, the spirit of Wales itself. (QEOM 7)

In the revised version of the broadcast, this whole passage is omitted in favor of the boy's "bard's-eye view" (QEOM 43) of the town, the "everlasting" park, and a final insight: "the memories of childhood have no order and no end" (QEOM 14). In fact, the central purpose of such reminiscences is to recapture or evoke the sense of undissociated sensibility to serve as a guide to a more permanent unity in adulthood. In such a search, memory is hardly passive but rather is associated with creative, imaginative vision. Thomas's prose synopsis of his unfinished final poem, In Country Heaven, makes the significance of memory clear. In this long poem the earth has been destroyed. The inhabitants of earth, now in "that state of being called his /God's/ country," redeem-by-remembering their lives on earth. Of these cosmic reminiscences, Thomas says

> The remembered tellings, which are the components of the poem, are not all told as though they are remembered; the poem will not be a series of poems in the past tense. The memory, in all its tenses, can look towards the future, can caution and admonish. The rememberer may live himself back into active participation in the remembered scene, adventure, or spiritual condition. (QEOM 156, 157)

This cultivation of what might be called "prophetic memory" in In Country Heaven appears in simpler form not only in "Reminiscences of Childhood" but in Thomas's three pieces on Christmas -- "A Child's Christmas in Wales," "Memories of Christmas," "Conversation about Christmas" -- and a final essay of reminiscence, "Return Journey," which evokes Thomas the adolescent in parallel fashion to "Reminiscences,"

which evokes Thomas the child.

The three Christmas pieces overlap considerably in material and phrasing. "Memories of Christmas" (1943) is an early version of the famous "A Child's Christmas in Wales" (1945), while "Conversation about Christmas" (1947) uses much of the material of the 1945 piece but casts the material into a dialogue between the Self and a Small Boy, two characters used briefly in one section of "A Child's Christmas."[85] Therefore, it is equally awkward to treat these memory pieces as either one reminiscence or three independent ones. In each piece, Thomas describes the evocation of Christmas memories by the use of a metaphor of snow. Snow is memory, a deep blanket into which the poet plunges his hands to draw up significant memories associated with Christmas (QEOM/US 14). The many Christmases of childhood are imagined as rolling down the slopes of Swansea to the sea, forming a veritable memory bank from which the poet draws his moments" (QEOM 22). That these moments represent an ideal, an imaginative re-creation from the details of memory rather than a factually accurate mirroring of those holidays, is clear. In "A Child's Christmas," for instance, Thomas remarks that

> One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now and out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six. (QEOM/US 14).

In "Memories of Christmas" Christmas Day is called "the never-to-be-forgotten day at the end of the unremembered year," for what the snows of memory cover is as crucial to the evocation of the Christmas Day of the Imagination ("December in my memory") as what the snows yield to the poet's hands (QEOM 22). One need only compare these Christmas pieces to Thomas's Christmas Day letter of 1933 to Pamela Johnson (SL 75-6) to see

how idealized these remembered Christmases are. In "Memories," again, Thomas creates the ideal Christmas of the child by not remembering as disillusioned adult what fascinated him as a child -- a Christmas tale:

> 'Once upon a time,' Jim said, 'there were three boys, just like us, who got lost in the dark in the snow, near Bethesda Chapel, and this is what happened to them . . .' It was the most dreadful happening I had ever heard. (QEOM 27)

Each Christmas reminiscence evokes the child consciousness that exists prior to the Romantic "fall." The Romantic wind-harp that unites man and nature appears in the child's "harp-shaped hills, when we sang and wallowed all night and day . . ." (QEOM/US 15). The child was one with nature animated, as that child's adult self remembers: ". . . we rode the daft and happy hills bare-back" (PS 97). The child was not estranged from nature, family, region, religion, or art. The last of these, art, in the form of song, opens and closes "A Child's Christmas." The children go from door to door singing the carol "Good King Wenceslas," a song whose story is one of communion, charity, and thanksgiving. However, the child's communion with these various externalities does not extend to the adult who is creatively remembering these crucial moments whose total is called Christmas Day. While the child can say "some words to the close and holy darkness" (QEOM/US 21) and then sleep, the adult narrator cannot. Especially in "Conversation about Christmas" the separation of the character Self from the character Small Boy is acute. There, the adult Self, while evoking childhood memories of Christmas, also recalls discordant memories: a dead bird in the snow on Christmas morning, "perhaps a robin, all but one of his fires out, and that fire still burning on his breast," or a bleak winter scene on Christmas Eve: "on the great loneliness of the small hill, a blackbird was silent in the snow" (PS 100). At the end of "Conversation," following the passage

identical to that in "A Child's Christmas" about Christmas evening prayers to the holy darkness, the Self and the Small Boy converse:

> Small Boy. But it all sounds like an ordinary Christmas.
> Self. It was.
> Small Boy. But Christmas when you were a boy wasn't any different to Christmas now.
> Self. It was, it was.
> Small Boy. Why was Christmas different then?
> Self. I mustn't tell you.
> Small Boy. Why can't Christmas be the same for me as it was for you when you were a boy?
> Self. I mustn't tell you. I mustn't tell you because it is Christmas now.
>
> (PS 103)

This final relationship between Self and the Small Boy is similar to that between Thomas the older poet and Thomas the child in "Fern Hill." Far from being a regressive retreat into childhood, the "Conversation about Christmas" clearly distinguishes the unified but perishable consciousness of the child, for which Christmas is only a symbol, from the estranged, prison-house consciousness of the Self, who, like Wordsworth in the Intimations Ode, bravely seconds the joy of the shepherd lad without entering fully into that state of being endemic to childhood. The final, seemingly simple comment of the Self, indicating an openness to receive the wonder of a child's Christmas, (at least not to deny yet that wonder to the Small Boy), is, to me, really very powerful, holding out just barely as it does in its whispering tone the possibility of the recapturing of wonder.

All three Christmas pieces exemplify what Vernon Watkins calls Thomas's "visionary memory," with which he would "reconstruct out of joy the truth of his childhood" (AST xii). Thomas's popular radio play, Under Milk Wood, grew out of similar impulses. In Under Milk Wood Thomas associates the child with an Edenic landscape and with love as a force binding man, God, and nature as one (UMW 48-53). A more melan-

choly reminiscence is "Return Journey" (1947), a broadcast based on Thomas's going home to a Swansea obliterated by bombing in World War II, in search of another self: the young, provincial poet. Like "Conversation about Christmas," whose dialogue structure reflects a psychic division between the Christmases of the Small Boy and the Self, "Return Journey" is cast into a series of scenes, mostly dialogues, between the Narrator (the Self of "Conversation") and various Swansea figures once associated with the poet Young Thomas. Like the three Christmas pieces, "Return Journey" is set in icy winter, this time, in February. The Narrator's quest after traces of his youthful self reveals the fickleness and whimsy of memory: some recall him well, others ill, or not at all. Beginning with his hotel (already a symbol of estrangement from the homey past), the wandering Narrator encounters a variety of figures, each successive one of which knew Thomas better and knew him as a slightly younger man. The Narrator remembers himself as a self-consciously Bohemian poet, the "Romantic" poet of popular imagination, but the Barmaid cannot remember Young Thomas from many other Thomases. During other encounters with a Customer, Old and Young Reporters, and a Passer-by, images of pre-war Swansea are evoked, including a fantastic catalogue of blitzed away stores that Thomas took from an old architectural map. We see Thomas the dissolute drinker, Thomas the cub reporter for a local newspaper, and Thomas among the artists of Swansea who met for coffee at the exotically named Kardomah Cafe, also, like the Three Lamps pub, destroyed by bombs. Wreckage of war and the white oblivion of snow make the Narrator's quest for his early self difficult: "the voices of fourteen years ago hung silent in the snow and ruin, and in the falling winter morning I walked on . . ." (QEOM 80). Moving from the sea-level part of Swansea up the cliffside street into the Uplands

where Young Thomas grew up and went to school, the Narrator encounters figures who knew Young Thomas more intimately. The Schoolmaster confirms the suspicion that the Narrator is searching not only for his young self but for his somehow lost, true self:

> SCHOOLMASTER: 'Oh yes, yes, I remember him well,
> though I do not know if I would recognize him now:
> nobody grows any younger, or better.'
> (QEOM 83; my italics)

The Narrator sees a list of the names of the school boys killed in the war. Like his own earlier self, these boys exist now in the eternal memory: "the names of the dead in the living heart and head remain forever" (QEOM 85). Here, the Narrator walks down again, to the promenade by the sea where he meets the Promenade-Man, a sort of prophet figure, wise man, or spirit of Swansea past, who we are told know all the dogs, boys, and lovers who once walked the promenade or lay in the sand. Like the Barmaid at the sea-level hotel, the Promenade-Man did not know Thomas as an individual but as one of many: "PROMENADE-MAN: Oh yes, yes, I remember him well, but I didn't know what was his name . . . Oh yes, I knew him well -- I've known him by the thousands" (QEOM 86-87). Following a few minor encounters, the Narrator walks up again, this time to Cwmdonkin Park to meet the old Park-Keeper, model for the hunchback artist of "The Hunchback in the Park," and a figure who, having known Young Thomas intimately as a child, stands at the fartherest remove from the adult Narrator and closest to the Edenic state of being from which the Narrator is excluded. The Narrator's description of the park that was once a child's Eden combines a lingering sense of joy with present estrangement. Music from a late piano lesson, now brought out of memory, tames the harsh, snow-filled wind: ". . . the childish, lonely, remembered music fingering on in the suddenly gentle wind." Yet the

dusk falls on the snow like a second, benighting snow, and the park seems a place of death:

> Soon the bell would ring for the closing of the gates, though the Park was empty. The park-keeper walked by the reservoir, where swans had glided, on his white rounds. I walked by his side and asked him my questions, up the swathed drives past buried beds and loaded utterly still furred and birdless trees towards the last gate. (QEOM 89)

The superfluous bell reinforces the feeling that what the park is empty of is not so much its present users but the Narrator's child self. The Park-Keeper, almost like the angel leading Adam and Eve out of Eden, gently takes the Narrator at dusk to "the last gate." The old swans that the child knew, Yeats's symbols of unity of being, are dead. Of the child, the Park-Keeper says two things. First, he speaks of years ago when the Narrator was a child: "I think he was happy all the time. I've known him by the thousands." Second, as the park bell announces the locking of the gates, the Park-Keeper answers a final question:

> Narrator
>
> . . . I said: What has become of him now?
>
> Park-Keeper
>
> Dead.
>
> Narrator
>
> The Park-Keeper said:
>
> (The park bell rings)
>
> Park-Keeper
>
> Dead . . . Dead . . . Dead . . . Dead . . . Dead . . . Dead. (QEOM 90)

Thomas's resume of an unwritten book, a "Welsh Journey," sums up what "Return Journey" is superficially about: "an intimate chronicle of my personal Journey among people and places" (SL 179). Yet in a deeper sense,

"Return Journey" as in the dream Thomas told to Leo Abse, is about a quest for Edenic consciousness, the unified sensibility of the child. The Narrator is Adam come back to Eden to find it in ruins. Thomas was obsessed with the idea of returning to "paradise" as a state of being. Even in "Ceremony After A Fire Raid" one encounters an image of Eden in desolation:

> O Adam and Eve together
> Under the sad breast of the headstone
> White as the skeleton
> Of the garden of Eden.
> (P 174)

In addition to "Return Journey" and the three Christmas pieces, two extremely obscure fragments of short stories, "An Adventure from a Work in Progress" and "In the Direction of the Beginning" are also attempts to "turn in time" and go back to childhood and its Eden. Briefly, "In the Direction of the Beginning (1938) tells the story of the birth of an Adam-hero and his immediate fall into self-consciousness and into the sense of corruption and flux. Unlike the Christian Adam who fell by transgression resulting from moral choice, Thomas's Adam-hero fits the Romantic myth as constructed by Northrop Frye: birth is the beginning of the fall, and each man must quest after his own unity of being by seeking the paradise of unified sensibility. Thomas's story addresses the question as to whether the hero's search for Edenic consciousness is nostalgic regression or the search for a higher unity that would justify a "fortunate fall" into self-consciousness. In the story, a man is born by the sea and sets sail in a boat "in the direction of the beginning." He encounters a woman who may be a femme fatale (" a siren . . . the cyclop breast . . . serpent-haired"), an earth-mother symbolizing the vitalism of nature and the fall into the cycles of generation, or possibly even a Muse figure playing a wind-harp ("her fingers flowed

over the voices . . . a siren stranger"; PS 92-3). The woman embraces and captures the hero, taking him into an island forest. The hero asks whether their journey is towards Genesis or Revelation: "Revelation stared back over its transfixed shoulder. Which was her genesis, the last spark of judgment or the first whale's spout . . . The conflagration at the end . . . or . . . the first spring . . .?" (PS 93). This unanswered question is addressed again in "An Adventure from a Work in Progress" (1939). In "An Adventure," as in the earlier story, a questing hero in a boat reaches an island, encounters a woman figure, and understands the experience in terms of a fall into self-consciousness and the desire to regain unity of being. Like the ancient mariner, the hero here undergoes a strange sea voyage through ice and heat, eventually reaching an island on which a tall woman stands. The hero understands that he is about to fall from eternity into time, a process that might be averted by union with the woman. However, union with the woman does not prevent the hero's awareness of the fall of time, so he journeys to another island, now in the world of time, where he encounters a second woman. Struggling through a muddy jungle filled with refuse from human civilization, the hero seizes the second woman. She then begins to devolve from woman to girl to monkey, sea-pig, and finally a white pool. Appalled, the hero returns to his boat and sails out into his destined life in time with all other creatures: "he rowed and sailed, that the world might happen to him once . . . on the common sea" (EPW 66). Each of these women seems to represent the search for unity of being: the first, the attempt of the hero to prevent his and the world's fall into time; the second, the more desperate attempt of the hero, once caught in time, to transcend it by ecstatic union. Such union, however, leads only to the heart of darkness, the pre-human,

primeval world, which the hero rejects for an experiential journey of the sea of time. Annis Pratt, one of the few commentators on Thomas's early prose, describes these two similar stories as examples of Blakean states of being. The hero of "An Adventure," she says, "participates in the Blakean fortunate fall from Edenic unity into 'division and multiplicity,' a condition necessary in Blake's writings to the eternal cycle of generation and regeneration."[86] In both stories, then, the undivided consciousness of the newborn child is fragmented, a quest for unity involving a sea journey occurs, and female figures of ambiguous significance allure, symbolizing either regression or attainment of a new unity, the continuation of the cycles of generation or an escape from those cycles.

The figure of the child, its relation to nature, and the crucial role of love in the search to regain the child's unified sensibility suggest two final important Romantic traits in Dylan Thomas's prose. Although less prominent in his non-fictional prose than other Romantic traits already discussed, these two traits that are important in the poetry must be considered here: the poet's relationship to nature and the function of love in relation to the problem of subject-object relations and imagination.

Much of the evidence in Thomas's prose that reveals his belief that the terms of man's relation to nature are a central problem for the poet has been presented in the earlier discussion of the problem of subject-object relations in Dylan Thomas's poems. There, it was discovered that Thomas sees the natural world as supernatural, a miracle, magic; like language, it was both thing and sign -- "stones are sermons, as are all things" (SL 83). Trees have "prophet's fingers" that point upward to a "sage or a night" that cries out its own explanation to the

translating poet (SL 53). Rejecting the rationalist's reduction of nature, Thomas says that one of his central poetic purposes is to seek kinship with all things, for the flesh of his body and the flesh of the sun are one (SL 63, 205, 87). Even chromosomes contain a god as must the poet who thinks in cells (SL 121, 84). In addition to these comments, one finds Thomas discussing the importance both of nature and of specified places in the inspiration or construction of a poem. It is an interesting fact that almost all of Thomas's poems were written in West Wales, most of them either in his parents' home that overlooked the large Cwmdonkin Park to one side and the whole Bristol Channel and southern horizon on the other, or else in small towns like New Quay and Laugharne, in the latter of which Thomas worked in a cliffside boathouse overlooking the estuary and hills. Although frequently in London for BBC work and/or sprees of drunkenness, Thomas found his deepest source of poetic inspiration in the natural landscape of Wales. An early letter written by Thomas just after he first moved to London supports this view:

> London is good; Porth is better; and the nostalgia for open and grassy space is . . . strong upon me. I go my way, and the rest of London goes theirs. All London is out of step except me . . .
>
> Yes, on deep consideration, Porth is better . . . It may seem affected, but I do really need hills around me before I can do my best with either stories or poems. The world here is so flat and unpunctuated like a bad poem . . . (TML 6-7)

And as a brief glance at either concordance to Thomas's poems will show, Thomas draws almost no image from twentieth-century life for his poems. Thomas once told John Malcolm Brinnin that his poems were "poems in priase of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God" (Life 326). To this paradoxical remark should be added Thomas's praise for Henry Vaughan's poem, "The Night," praise that describes equally well Thomas's

own later landscape poems: "the figures of his authentic and intense vision move across a wild, and yet inevitably ordered, sacred landscape" (QEOM 141). Yet this sacred landscape is not immune to time and death, nor can nature alone repair the ravages of man; only the poet, through the exercise of imagination, may somehow overcome this sense of doom that William Empson calls Thomas's "pessimistic pantheism" (Life 262). When Vernon Watkins labels Thomas a "Blakean Christian," he is thinking of Thomas's sense of the glory of the natural world combined with a sense a primordial fall that manifests itself in terms of the Romantic myth: "Dylan," Watkins says, "recognised a great error in the Past and he saw ruin ahead; but every colour and glory and holiness of every creature was real to Dylan, not a one-toned gloomy world, but the most rich and variegated one belonged to his vision of God; and so the pantheism" (Life 262). To redeem nature by imagination and its agent love became Thomas's ultimate solution to the problem of self and world, both locked in death and time. In an early letter Thomas links the experience of wonder before nature with the fostering of love:

> . . . I so passionately believed and so passionately want to believe, in the magic of this burning and bewildering universe, in the meaning and the power of symbols, in the miracle of myself & of all mortals, in the divinity that is so near us and so longing to be nearer, in the staggering, bloody, starry wonder of the sky I can see above and the sky I can think of below. When I learn that the stars I see may be but the backs of the stars I see there, I am filled with the terror which is the beginning of love. (SL 83)

Paul Ferris points out that Thomas searched his whole life for places that brought a sense of security -- "he needed safe places" (Ferris 193) -- whether these places were, as Thomas punningly says, "a womb with a view" or the village and the landscape of Milk Wood, "this place of love" (UMW 76) that combined the best of nature and a pastoral paradise governed

by all the varieties of love. Another important place that Thomas associates with nature, poetry, and love is Fernhill. Fernhill was also associated with childhood as it is in "Fern Hill," his story "The Peaches," and even in some prose jottings recorded near the end of his life: "a place with which I have come to associate all the summer of my chil . . . a lovely farm -- a lonely farm -- and a place with which I have come to associate all the golden -- never shone a sun like that old rolling . . ." (Ferris 45). Like Fernhill, Cwmdonkin Park, as the BBC reminiscences show, was also, in Paul Ferris's words, "a locked corner of childhood to brood over" (Ferris 44), a place of nature, love, and poetry symbolized by the hunchback in the park-poem "The Hunchback in the Park." A final place of great significance in Thomas's writings is Laugharne, a model for the town of Milk Wood and itself set in a strikingly beautiful landscape. Like the house next to Cwmdonkin Park, Laugharne was a place for poetic inspiration and for work. On the other hand, even during his earliest visits to London, Thomas never really felt at home, as he makes clear in a 1936 letter to Richard Church: "I haven't, actually, been at all well, and am about to go into the country again -- the only place for me, I think: cities are death" (TML 10). (These periodically necessary trips to London Thomas called Capitol Punishment.) Later, America would become on a larger scale the deadly attraction that "nightmare London" (LVW 54) had been earlier, a place of drink and no poems. Unlike London or America, the village of Laugharne was a place of creative work. Many of Thomas's famous later poems are landscape poems set near the village: "Poem in October," "Fern Hill," "Poem On His Birthday," "Over Sir John's Hill," "In Country Sleep," and "Author's Prologue," as well as Under Milk Wood. The first of these, "Poem in October," Thomas himself recognized as "a Laugharne poem: the first place poem I've written"

(LVW 114). Strictly speaking, it was hardly the first place poem he had done, but it was the first of the series of late, major landscape poems, and it adheres closely to the pattern of the "greater Romantic lyric" as defined by M. H. Abrams. Vernon Watkins sees Thomas's removal from wartime London to post-war Laugharne as poetic strategy, the Welsh village providing the atmosphere in which his imagination fought back against both the horrors of London in the blitz and the contemplated final horror of a nuclear war to come (AST xiii). Elsewhere, Watkins calls Laugharne ". . . a fishing village at the end of the world . . . the last refuge of life and sanity in a nightmare world." There, Watkins says, "the chief part of his creative writing was done in the landscape and among the people to whom he was most deeply attached" (LVW 19-20). Outside his poetry, Thomas describes his feeling about Laugharne and the surrounding landscape. In a letter to Margaret Taylor, wife of historian A. J. P. Taylor and a benefactor of Thomas who bought him his house in Laugharne, Thomas describes his feelings upon settling down for good in Laugharne. The landscape is associated with the child's experience of nature, "the field of infancy where even now we are all running," with traditional pastoral, "the only Golden Age," and with medieval Britain, "the same rooks talking as in Arthur's time" (SL 324-25). As in "Return Journey" and the two stories about the quest for paradise, Thomas here associates time with a fall: for the townclock of Laugharne, he says, tells time backwards, so that its residents always journey back towards the twin paradise of Arcadia and childhood (SL 324). In a BBC broadcast entitled "Laugharne," Thomas makes a similar point about the sleepy seaside village's apparent immunity to time, its appearance as an enchanted place where human eccentricities are tolerated (QEOM 70-72). This idea of the Just Village (rather than the Just City

which had become "nightmare London") informs Thomas's play Under Milk Wood. The village is distinguished from the metropolis by its more intimate contact with the landscape. In his letter to Margaret Taylor, Thomas, admitting the significant role that the landscape outside Laugharne was playing in his poems, speaks of ". . . the grey estuary, forever linked to me with poems done and to be" (SL 324). In an interview with students at the University of Utah, Thomas, although intentionally sarcastic as he often was under such conditions, confirms what the late poems reveal: that he composed in the boathouse looking directly out over the estuary landscape that dominates these poems:

> Ghiselin: You always seem to put in your poetry just what you are seeing at the moment -- the heron, and the birds near the estuary, for instance?
>
> Thomas: Yes -- yes. I wanted to write about the cliff, and there was a crow flying above it, and that seemed a good place to begin, so I wrote about the crow. Yes, if I see a bird, I put it in whether it belongs or not.
>
> Ghiselin: Do you leave it there?
>
> Thomas: If it is happy and at home in the poetry, I do. But really I should get a blind for my window.[87]

Of the three nature-spots most closely associated with Thomas's poetry -- Cwmdonkin Park, Fernhill, and Laugharne -- it is Laugharne that has become the place of pilgrimage for dedicated Thomists, but this is so as much for the intrinsic beauty of the landscape as for a brief visit to the gravesite. In fact, two generously illustrated coffee-table books on Laugharne and Thomas exist: Laugharne and Dylan Thomas and The Dylan Thomas Landscape.[88]

Before all these magical nature-spots, Thomas says that he had the experience of wonder at the created universe, both as normally perceived and as revealed in its visionary entirety, as "the beginning of love"

(SL 83). The word "love" appears in Thomas's Collected Poems eighty-nine times, more often than any other word besides "man." Thomas's poetry addresses a wide variety of loves from heterosexual sex to necrophilia, from the attraction of the anima to the femme fatale, the journey of the foetus from the womb and a poet's love for long dead women buried on a Welsh hillside. Love is associated both with art and with nature. In his verse prologue to Collected Poems, "Author's Prologue," the poet in the guise of Noah builds ark-poems "to the best of my love" to save the natural world from nuclear destruction. Filled with animals, the arks are "manned with their loves," uniting man, nature (animals), poetry, and love with the poet as savior, Noah, the type of Christ. In "Poem On His Birthday" the poet says that "love unbolts the dark" to reveal nature in its unfallen, imaginative entirety, while in the poem "In the White Giant's Thigh" the poet associates love, nature, and deathlessness: "Teach me the love that is evergreen after the fall leaved / Grave" (P 4, 5, 205, 210). Clearly, Thomas came to see love as a redemptive agent, associated with nature and the act of poetic creation. In terms of the Romantic myth, the poet is Christ, his message is love, and imagination is the seeding-ground of love. Thomas's concern with love not only informs some of his best poems but appears occasionally even in his letters and critical prose.

Ralph Maud records a remark made by Thomas during his 1952 reading tour of America: "You can put all you have to say in a single sentence and it isn't a poem. You can say God is Love, or Love is God, and have done with it -- go out and play golf."[89] Remembering that Thomas also calls himself a praiser of God's world who doesn't believe in God and that in a late poem he calls God "great / And fabulous," heaven a place "that never was / Nor will be ever" though God is "dear" and heaven some-

how "true," one may better understand Thomas's designation of "love" as "God." One may also better understand Thomas's famous "Note" to Collected Poems:

> I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: 'I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!' These poems, with all their crudities, doubts, and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't.
>
> (CP vii)

Like the shepherd, the poet half creates what he wishes to perceive through the ritual of poetic creation, the moon being imagination that oversees the flocks of poems. Whatever "God" signifies is contained within the concept of love. In his famous poem on poetry, "In My Craft Or Sullen Art," Thomas announces that his own poems are written not for the orthodox aristocrats

> With their nightingales and psalms
> But for the lovers, their arms
> Round the griefs of the ages

who, because they love and because their love contains both time and loss, do not need the poet's poems. Thomas often describes his poems in terms of love, physical and/or spiritual. The creative use of language in poetry is a kind of lovemaking: "no single word in all our poetical vocabulary is a virgin word, ready for our first love . . ." (SL 91). Elsewhere, he speaks of wanting to rehabilitate a "used" word, like a cast-off whore, "to smooth away the lines of its dissipation, and to put it on the market again, fresh and virgin" (SL 24). Likewise, to put pen to paper in the act of engendering a poem is a sexual act, as Thomas implies in a momentary refusal to do so: "the paper has been too virgin to deflower" (SL 86). As we have already seen, Thomas frequently uses organic metaphors to describe the process of making a poem; sometimes, as

well, the links the organic metaphor to a sexual one: "poetry . . . should be as orgiastic and organic as copulation" (SL 151). Not only words or the act of poetic creation but also the finished poems are associated with love. Thus, Thomas speaks of entering a room "where poems are waiting as themselves rooms, places of love, as when he says he wants "to build poems big & solid enough for people to be able to walk & sit about and eat & drink and make love in them" (SL 336). To his mother, Thomas described all his later poems as "my love poems," a phrase that reinforces the view that love as an agent of redemption was increasingly important to Thomas (Ferris 252). In fact, in some comments made in a BBC broadcast of some of his own poems, Thomas describes his poetical development in terms of the Romantic problem of subject-object relations and the importance of love as a healing force:

> The next poem I'll read /"After the Funeral"/ is the only one I have written that is, directly, about the life and death of one particular human being I knew -- and not about the very many lives and deaths whether seen, as in my first poems, in the tumultuous world of my own being or, as in the later poems, in war, grief, and the great holes and corners of universal love. (QEOM 137)

If Thomas knows himself here, his early poems are either psychodramas projected onto a landscape or else inner landscapes that absorb the external world into the self-centered world of the poet. In the later poems, nature is externalized, made sacramental, and the poet adopts the more traditional Romantic role of nature's priest as in "A Refusal to Mourn . . . ," "Ceremony After A Fire Raid," "In Country Sleep," and "Over Sir John's Hill." The poet's task is to mend the rifts in "universal love," the force that heals all dualisms but which is itself tattered by personal loss and world war. This is, indeed, a Shelleyan task. The poem that Thomas read just after his comments on "universal

love" was "After the Funeral," a poem that marks Thomas's emergence from the self-fascination of his early poems in order to adopt the more Wordsworthian role of the poet as priest-like bringer of relationship and love. In fact, the poem closes with an envisioned transformation of two objects common in Welsh country households -- a stuffed fox and a fern:

> . . . this monumental
> Argument of the hewn voice, gesture and psalm,
> Storm me forever over her grave until
> The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love
> And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill.
> (P 137)

This importance of love as a redemptive force and a healing power able to overcome the split between subject and object explains Thomas's remarks on love that he makes independent of its function in the poem. Daniel Jones reports that Thomas strongly desired love relationships in the "exterior world" but found himself somehow trapped in an "interior world" that alone seemed real (MFDT 110). Jones's point receives support from a passage in Thomas's unfinished autobiographical novel Adventures in the Skin Trade. There, as noted earlier, Sam Bennet, being seduced by his first London girl, thinks "O God . . . make me feel something . . . I must be impotent" (AST 31). On the other hand, a similar poet-hero, in the short story "One Warm Saturday" that concludes the collection of stories entitled Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog, follows a willing Swansea girl through a dark building though failing to find her in the end like other of Thomas's poet questers after ambiguous or elusive feminine figures. In another Portrait story, "Just Like Little Dogs," the poet-hero experiences an infinite moment in which his sympathetic love flows out over the universe uniting him to it:

> And I never felt more a part of the remote and over-
> pressing world, or more full of love and arrogance

> and pity and humility, not for myself alone, but for the living earth I suffered on and for the unfeeling systems in the upper air, Mars and Venus and Brazell and Skully, men in China and St. Thomas, scorning girls and ready girls, soldiers and bullies and policemen and sharp, suspicious buyers of second-hand books, bad, ragged women who'd pretend against the museum wall for a cup of tea, and perfect, unapproachable women out of the fashion magazines, seven feet high, sailing slowly in their flat, glazed creations through steel and glass and velvet. (PA 57)

A similar example of what Walford Davies calls "the paradox of romantic loneliness expanding into universal sympathy" is the action of Thomas the cub reporter in "Old Garbo." There, as did Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, young Thomas places himself in a large perspective: "I wrote my name, "Reporters' Room, Tawe News, Tawe, South Wales, England, Europe, The Earth.'" (PA 91).[90]

Because of his belief in the importance of love, Thomas feels that the consequence of a particular love between a man and a woman may have cosmic significance. This theme is the major subject of many poems in his difficult "middle" verse of the late 1930s and early 1940s. In an early letter to Trevor Hughes, Thomas imagines the marriage of two artistic rebels as a kind of redemptive act (TML 6). To Vernon Watkins, Thomas explains in 1940 the meaning of his new poem "Into Her Lying Down Head," a poem which he considered calling "Modern Love":

> All over the world love is being betrayed as always, and a million years have not calmed the uncalculated ferocity of each betrayal or the terrible loneliness afterwards. Man is denying his partner man or woman and whores with the whole night, begetting a monstrous brood; one day the brood will not die when the day comes but will hang on to the breast and the parts and squeeze his partner out of bed . . . It's a poem of wide implications, if not of deep meanings . . . (LVW 92)

Obviously, the disruption of love is far more than a marital spat and its temporary inconveniences: it is a threat to the poet's vision of the universe as a single, loving whole. If God and love are one, as

Thomas says, then any threat to love is a threat to the ordering principle of the cosmos. Since "God is the country of the spirit," since "there is no room in the country of the spirit for the man who accepts, or does not accept, without hate or love," and since "hate and love . . . are nearly one," then the fostering of love in all its forms becomes almost the single duty of the poet (SL 29). Even the "organic god" that lives in chromosomes tells the poet "you stick as near as you can to what you love'" (SL 121) in writing poems.

Included among Thomas's loves was certainly his love for Caitlin, his wife, the subject of many of the "marriage poems" of Thomas's middle period. As Robert Graves points out in The White Goddess, "Muse-poets" (Romantics) are often attracted to strong women who embody, for a time, the Muse who is the inspiration and subject of the Muse-poet's poems. Caitlin Thomas, a Bohemian Irish dancer and once the mistress of the painter Augustus John, was described by one of Thomas's London friends as "like the figurehead of a ship, a fantastic poet's girl, a sort of corn-goddess" (Ferris 158). One of Thomas's last recorded remarks in the week before he died seems to link Caitlin to the inner light of poetic inspiration: "'You have no idea how beautiful she is," he said; "there is an illumination about her . . . she shines" (DTA 274). More conclusively, a fragment found among manuscript drafts of "Poem On His Birthday" reveals the intimate relation of love and Thomas's poetry:

> How can I write a poem to a human
> Being when every bloody line I write
> Is only about my loving one woman?
> (Ferris 264)

A final source of information for Thomas's intensity of love for Caitlin as a Muse figure is a series of love letters published in McCall's (February, 1966) but never incorporated into Selected Letters. Thomas's

love letters reveal an almost unbelievably intense need for love (as Jones noted). Filled with almost every love cliche, these letters still may help explain the intensity of Thomas's other associations of love with the wonder of nature, the idea of God, and the purpose of the poet in making his poems. To Caitlin, Thomas writes: "we are the same, we are one thing, the constant thing." Caitlin is "My Own Heart My Little One Caitlin my wife and LOVE & Eternity." Also his "sacred sweetheart," Caitlin is addressed even as the savior: "please Christ, my love," and she is told "I knew always, I loved you more than any man has ever loved a woman since the earth began; but now I love you more than that. I love you, my dear golden Caitlin, profoundly & truly & forever."[91] Though sentimental in the extreme, these letters may help explain Thomas's remark about one of the marriage poems that "it's a poem of wide implications," for the love between a man and a woman is one strand in the fabric of universal love. Troubles in marriage, however, were not the only cause for writings concerned with the failure of love to "unbolt the dark." In fact, the search for love sometimes led to further estrangement, as in the short story "A Prospect of the Sea" in which the poet-hero encounters <u>la belle dame sans merci</u>.

"A Prospect of the Sea" opens with a picture of the boy narrator lying in a paradise of blue sky and yellow corn. The boy remembers the story of a drowned princess from a book of fairytales and makes up his own story of the mermaid princess. However, the beautiful summer landscape overcomes the story made up of mere words and the boy returns to his daydreaming. Suddenly a country girl appears in a tree, similar in feature to the princess in the story yet with a torn dress, brown legs, broken fingernails, and berry-stained mouth. Just as the boy convinces himself that she is just a rural girl and not the mermaid princess of

his story, the girl causes the landscape to shrink momentarily and lifts her dress up to her waist to entice the boy to sexual intercourse. Again, she seems a normal if rather forward young girl until the boy looks more closely at her outward appearance: "The stain on her lips was blood, not berries; and her nails were not broken but sharpened sideways . . . (PS 6). Leaning over the boy to embrace him, her looming face blocks out all of nature (returned now to its normal size). The boy wonders whether he and the girl are not enacting an old folktale about the abduction of a human by a fairy or witch:

> This is a story, he said to himself, about a boy on a holiday kissed by a broom-rider; she flew from a tree on to a hill that changes its size like a frog that loses its temper; she stroked his eyes and put her chest against him; and when she had loved him until he died she carried him off inside her to a den in a wood. But the story, like all stories, was killed as she kissed him; now he was a boy in a girl's arms, and the hill stood above a true river . . . (PS 6-7)

A situation similar to that in Keats's La Belle Dame Sans Merci or Yeats's "The Stolen Child," Thomas's narrative emphasizes the ambiguity of the experience of natural-supernatural love: is it a country girl or a mermaid-witch-princess, anima or femme fatale? Is the external world the "real" world or is the real world the internal world of imagination, represented by the story of the princess, the folktale of the witch, the boy's own story, and the girl's power to change the landscape to her will? Reverting again to her supernatural guise, the girl offers him both love and death: "'I'll have a baby on every hill,'" she says, but she also says "'I have a sister in Egypt . . . who lives in a pyramid" (PS 7). This sister -- Cleopatra or Isis? -- represents Eros but also death, as does the girl herself. The boy acquiesces in the girl's desire, and, after the lovemaking, is granted a mountain

vision of the whole earth and its past stretching back to Eden. Eden is seen as "undrowned," extending upward and downward from its middle plateau to heaven and to the lower earth; an "endless corridor of boughs and birds and leaves," Eden encompasses the world whose "two poles kissed behind his shoulders" (PS 9). Like Adam on Pisgah, the boy enjoys an extensive vision of history; but the enchantress girl whispers "wake up" and the vision fades. As a final display of power, the girl causes nature to be drained of color, creating "transparent trees" and "gauze" wood. Turning to the boy, she tells him of herself yet remains elusive: "She told him her name, but he had forgotten it as she spoke; she told him her age, and it was a new number" (PS 9). For the last time the enchantress reverts to the guise of the country girl; then, like a mermaid, she runs into the sea where, as the boy yells "Come back! Come back!" she is received by all those who were ever drowned at sea (PS 10-11). The voices of birds and echoes warn the boy, "do not adventure any more" (PS 10, 12), and an owl says to the pursuing boy, "you shall never go back" (PS 12) as the mermaid fades into the waves. The story ends in a strange final paragraph in which the solitary boy observes a man: it is Noah, and rain begins to fall. Representing the power of the self over nature and also the lethal but fascinating power of love, the girl seems to represent also an avenue by which the boy can return to the state of being called Eden. But in this case, the return is in vision only and the girl disappears.

As in the story "The Mouse and the Woman," so here Thomas presents us with a poet-hero who creates a beautiful yet dangerous female figure with which he desires union. The woman is associated with the power to reveal or reshape the external world and to grant the boy a vision of Eden, the place of unity of being. Eden, in turn, is here again asso-

ciated with language ("the pages were gardens"; PS 9) as is the girl, who emerges out of the boy's own story of her -- itself derived from a "Christmas book" tale -- and whom the boy calls a witch out of folk-tales. The boy's entire experience with the girl is called a "story": "This is a story, he said to himself, about a boy on a holiday kissed by a broom-rider" (PS 6). Conjured up out of his imagination, the girl returns to the unconsciousness of mind or nature (the sea). Since Eden is "undrowned" in the boy's mountain vision, Eden must be considered as "drowned" otherwise, sunken, according to Frye's Romantic myth, in the unconsciousness, from which it is evoked by the girl. Unable to attain his quest for union with the girl and unable to sustain without her the vision of an undrowned Eden, the boy is left in the position of one of the antediluvian damned watching Noah prepare his ark. As Noah's flood in Christian myth represents a further falling away of man from God and a further distancing of man from Eden, the boy's encounter with the girl must represent an early crisis of estrangement from the outer world and Eden-childhood. The overlay of visionary and non-visionary worlds; of a country girl and a Muse-enchantress; of a beautiful but normal landscape with a vibrant, mystical one full of prophetic, speaking birds; of nature and myth reinforces Thomas's theory that the poet confronts the problem of the "interior world" of imagination and the "exterior world" of habitual perception. And, in the case of "A Prospect of the Sea," Thomas also associates exotic love and the desire for union with a self-created female figure of ambiguous nature and intent with a coalescence (imperfectly realized here) of those two worlds. Having failed in his quest, the poet-narrator is faced with the same fate as his counterpart in "The Mouse and the Woman." There, the poet creates a woman in a poem who becomes a flesh-and-blood woman (PS 62). When that woman, too, de-

parts, the poet expresses to his father the importance of love and the outlaw fate of the person who fails to keep it: "'Father,' he said, 'I have been walking over the world, looking for a thing worthy to love, but I drove it away and go now from place to place, moaning my hideousness . . . '" (PS 71).

As in the BBC reminiscences and, at the end of his career, Under Milk Wood, so in these stories Thomas is concerned with lost worlds -- of love, of childhood, of a supernatural nature, of the Edenic consciousness -- all varieties of the Romantic search for a solution to the problem of subject-object relations, what Thomas calls his "interior" and "exterior" worlds. Also, as we have seen, Thomas's views on the nature and function of poetry and the poetic process are consistent with Romantic theory. Most important of these views is the belief that it is through the actual exercise of poetic powers that the poet can resolve the problem of subject-object relations. Thomas's own remark on this question provides a standard by which, in the next three chapters, we shall measure the success of his work as poetry in the Romantic tradition:[92]

> Perhaps the greatest works of art are those that reconcile, perfectly, inner and outer. (SL 10)

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]W. B. Yeats, "Introduction" to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. v-xiii; rpt. in Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism, ed. John Hollander (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 85, 86-7; Spears, p. 29; C. K. Stead, The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot (1964; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 54.

[2]Spears, p. 9; John Hollander, "Modern British Literature," in The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, II, p. 1514.

[3]W. B. Yeats, "Introduction" to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, p. 95.

[4]W. B. Yeats, "Modern Poetry," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 499.

[5]Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, pp. 461, 463; Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture (New York: Viking, 1961), p. xiii; Lionel Trilling, "On the Modern Element in Literature," in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p. 82.

[6]Ortega Y. Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," in The Dehumanization of Art, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 3-54.

[7]Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 69-70.

[8]Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 61.

[9]Bate, The Burden of the Past, p. 117.

[10]Irving Howe, "The Idea of the Modern," in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), pp. 11-40.

[11]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 28.

[12]Peckham, Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century, pp. 31-32, 351.

[13]Randall Jarrell, "The End of the Line," The Nation, 21 February 1942, pp. 222-28; rpt. in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe, p. 159.

[14]J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 1-5.

[15]Miller, pp. 7-9.

[16]R. B. Kershner, Dylan Thomas: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976), pp. 3, 81-82; George Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, pp. 18-19.

[17]Spears, pp. 20-28.

[18]Spears, pp. 36, 38, 44.

[19]Spears, pp. 15, 229f.

[20]Spears, pp. 55, 57.

[21]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 418f.

[22]Spears, pp. 54, 262.

[23]Ernest Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), p. 3.

[24]Fausset, pp. 273, 74.

[25]Peckham, "Aestheticism to Modernism," pp. 214, 225.

[26]Peter Conrad, "The Religion of Romanticism," Times Literary Supplement, 23 May 1975, p. 550.

[27]Foakes, pp. 166, 181.

[28]Geoffrey Hartman, "Reflections on Romanticism in France," Studies in Romanticism, 9 (Fall, 1970), 233.

[29]John Bayley, The Romantic Survival (1957; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), pp. 6-7, 198.

[30]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp. 14, 32.

[31]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp. 427-31.

[32]M. H. Abrams, "Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Modernist Poetics," in Immanente Asthetik, Asthetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne, ed. W. Iser (Munich: n.p., 1966), pp. 113-38.

[33]L. J. Swingle, "Romantic Unity and English Romantic Poetry," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 74 (July, 1975), 361-74.

[34]Bloom, The Visionary Company, pp. 463, 324; The Ringers in the Tower, p. 340; "Romantic Poetry," p. 3.

[35]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry, p. 3.

[36]Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower, pp. 190, 330.

[37]Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, p. 35; The Ringers in the Tower, p. 52.

[38]Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower, pp. 218-19.

[39]Winters, In Defense of Reason, pp. 3-14.

[40]Winters, In Defense of Reason, p. 11; Yvor Winters, Forms of Discovery (Chicago: Swallow, 1967), pp. 251-52.

[41]Winters, In Defense of Reason, pp. 7-11, 452-53.

[42]Winters, In Defense of Reason, pp. 9, 459.

[43]Winters, Forms of Discovery, pp. 147-49; The Function of Criticism, p. 67.

[44]Winters, The Function of Criticism, p. 12; Forms of Discovery, pp. 251, 148.

[45]Winters, In Defense of Reason, pp. 460, 460-501, 501.

[46]Winters, The Function of Criticism, pp. 159, 162, 179.

[47]Winters, In Defense of Reason, pp. 283-99; 431-59; 575-603; The Function of Criticism, p. 14.

[48]Jarrell, pp. 158-66.

[49]Jarrell, pp. 162-64, 165-66.

[50]Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1939; "A Retrospective Introduction," 1965), pp. viii-ix.

[51]Brooks, "A Retrospective Introduction," p. xxvii.

[52]Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1947), pp. 18, 207; Cleanth Brooks, "The Poem as Organism," English Institute Annual (1940), pp. 20-41.

[53]Richard Foster, The New Romantics: A Reappraisal of the New Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962), p. 32.

[54]Furst, Romanticism, p. 18.

[55]David Thorburn, "Conrad's Romanticism," in Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities, eds. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 229; Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 145.

[56]Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern (1963; rpt. London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 48-49.

[57]Stead, pp. 13, 15, 189.

[58]Hartman, "Reflections on Romanticism in France," p. 233.

[59]Edward Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 305-06.

[60]Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," p. 133; Boas, "The Romantic Self," 15.

[61]Howe, pp. 14-15, 21, 22.

[62]Langbaum, Modern Spirit, pp. 167-83.

[63]Sypher, pp. 32, 77.

[64]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 6.

[65]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 23.

[66]Bloom, "Romantic Poetry," p. 6.

[67]Harry Williams, "Dylan Thomas' Poetry of Redemption: Its Blakean Beginnings," Bucknell Review, 20 (Winter, 1972), 107-20. Williams traces analogues between Blake and Thomas, the most significant being each poet's struggle to enter the unfallen world and achieve his own redemption. For Thomas, as William notes, language is a central weapon in the struggle.

[68]Alastair Reid, Untitled Memoir, in Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, ed. E. W. Tedlock (see Chapter I, note 17), p. 54.

[69]quoted in Kent Thompson, "An Approach to the Early Poems of Dylan Thomas, Anglo-Welsh Review, 14 (Winter, 1964-65), p. 84.

[70]David Holbrook, Dylan Thomas: The Code of Night (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), pp. 127-30.

[71]Dylan Thomas, "On Reading His Poetry," p. 35.

[72]Donald Hall, "Dylan Thomas and Public Suicide," American Poetry Review, January-February 1978, p. 10.

[73]Dylan Thomas, "On Reading His Poetry," p. 36.

[74]Dylan Thomas, et al, "Poetry and the Film: A Symposium," Film Culture, No. 29 (Summer, 1963), p. 57.

[75]Dylan Thomas, "On Reading His Poetry," p. 37.

[76]Dylan Thomas, "Poetry and the Film," p. 57.

[77]Abrams, "Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Modernist Poetics," p. 138.

[78]Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell," Encounter, 13 (December, 1959), 67.

[79]Adix, p. 62.

[80]Walford Davies, "Introduction" to Selected Poems of Dylan Thomas, pp. 14-15.

[81]Theodore Roethke, Untitled Memoir, in Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the Poet, ed. E. W. Tedlock, p. 52.

[82]Walford Davies, "The Wanton Starer," in Dylan Thomas: New Critical Essays (London: Dent, 1972), pp. 156-57.

[83]Holbrook, The Code of Night, p. 191.

[84]Dylan Thomas, et al, "On Poetry: A Discussion," Encounter, 3 (November, 1954), 23.

[85]W. Eugene Davis, "The Making of 'A Child's Christmas in Wales'," Arizona Quarterly, 29 (Winter, 1973), pp. 342-51.

[86]Annis Pratt, Dylan Thomas' Early Prose: A Study in Creative Mythology (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), p. 76.

[87]Adix, pp. 64-65.

[88]Min Lewis, Laugharne and Dylan Thomas (London: Dennis Dobson, 1967); Don Sinnock, The Dylan Thomas Landscape (Swansea: Celtic Educational Services, 1975).

[89]quoted in Ralph Maud, Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), p. 81.

[90]Walford Davies, "Imitation and Invention: the Use of Borrowed Material in Dylan Thomas's Prose," Essays in Criticism, 18 (July, 1968), p. 291.

[91]Dylan Thomas, "Love Letters from a Poet to His Wife," McCall's, February 1966, pp. 73, 178.

[92]Scattered throughout the numerous essays on Thomas's poetics and poems are many references to the poet as "Romantic" or "a Romantic." Here is a brief sampling. First of all, critics who remember Thomas from his American tours think of him as the archetype of the Romantic Bard. Kenneth Rexroth, for instance, calling the poet "the most influential of the Romantics," says that Thomas's emotional expressivism is his dominant trait: Thomas "doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve. He takes you by the neck and rubs your nose in it" (Kenneth Rexroth, quoted in Robert Resor, rev. of The New British Poets, ed. Kenneth Rexroth, Spirit, 16 (November, 1949), 157. David Rees, in a review of critical studies on Thomas, speaks of "the unprecedented public acceptance of Thomas as The Last Romantic" (David Rees, rev. of The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas by H. H. Kleinman, Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry by Ralph Maud, and Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body by A. T. Davies, Spectator, 21 August 1964, p. 246). To Alfred Kazin, Thomas's success as a public figure satisfied an ingrained popular conception of the poet as a self-destroying Romantic egoist: "He will soon be dead. The legend of the poet-dying-young is based not merely on the opposition between poetic idealism and a materialistic society documented by Chatterton, Keats, Shelley, Hart Crane, but on

the romantic faith that true poetry is of a shattering intensity that destroys the poet even as it brings out of him, in letters of fire, the poetry itself (Alfred Kazin, "The Posthumous Life of Dylan Thomas," rev. Dylan Thomas in America by John Malcolm Brinnin and Leftover Life to Kill by Caitlin Thomas, Atlantic Monthly, October 1957, p. 164. Francis Scarfe describes the Neo-Romanticism of the 1940s in terms of a continuity with High Romanticism of which Dylan Thomas is the latest major link: "We are moving towards a new Romantic Movement . . . We are moving towards a more personal language on the one hand, and on the other towards a profoundly sensual conception of life and poetry. So many seeds of Romanticism, planted in the past by Blake, by Byron, by Shelley, Wilde, Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, are in process of bearing fruit" (in Hoxie N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in Modern Poetry, VI: 1920-65, Columbia, 1968, p. 365). Stephen Spender, making a similar point, links Thomas to the Romantics by the way in which these poets offer their autobiographies as models for the reader: "the seductive artistic 'I' . . . suggests that what is art for the artists, might become life for the spectator and reader living out Romantic feelings. Every reader is free to imagine himself to some extent a potential Byron, Keats, Shelley or Dylan Thomas not in writing his Romantic poetry, but in taking over his feelings and behaviour, sharing his self-destruction, loving his women, drinking his drinks" (Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern, p. 136). Such a reader may also recognize Thomas's affinity with the Romantic concern with nature. James E. Miller and Bernice Slote, in an essay comparing Thomas to the American Romantic Walt Whitman, emphasize the two poets' insistent connection of the body of man to the organic universe around him (James E. Miller and Bernice Slote, "Of Monkeys, Nudes, and the Good Gray Poet: Dylan Thomas and Walt Whitman," Western Humanities Review, 13 / Autumn, 1959 /, 339-53). Several critics note an affinity with Wordsworth. Thomas finds his salvation in nature, though he expresses it in words that might shock that early Romantic" (Thomas Carter, rev. In Country Sleep, by Dylan Thomas, p. 25; see Chapter I, note 86). Thomas Blackburn links the two poets by a similar concern for relating the self and nature: "Like Wordsworth's his / Thomas's / poetry is an exploration of himself, and this self expands and becomes almost indistinguishable from its environment. Water, trees and hills all share in the poet's speech and are part of an articulate universe" (Thomas Blackburn, The Price of an Eye, Longmans, 1961, p. 119). Gilbert Highet, in a keen comparison of Thomas to Wordsworth and Coleridge, comments in his obituary on Thomas that just as Wordsworth and Coleridge lost in their thirties the child's vision of nature as spiritual and whole, so Thomas began to suffer a similar loss. However, Highet argues, "Dylan Thomas would never accept it" and so drank himself to death (Gilbert Highet, "Death of a Poet," in Talents and Geniuses, Oxford Univ. Press, 1957, p. 90). A defiant attitude towards a nature that seemed fallen to the adult poet introduces a complementary affinity with Blake. Again, many critics mention Blake, largely on the basis on Thomas's own positive remarks about the man whom he considered the greatest poet. Two critics have made particular comparisons. Joseph Wittreich, in a short note mentions two debts by Thomas to Blake: (1) Thomas's concept of warring opposites and contraries in the poetic process and (2) Thomas's belief in the "revolutionary" artist who refashions inherited tradition to create new art, not further imitations within an established tradition (Joseph Wittreich, "Dylan Thomas' Conception of

Poetry: A Debt to Blake," English Language Notes, 6 / March, 1964 /, 197-200). In a more significant essay, Harry Williams elaborates on Wittreich's short note. Williams argues that Thomas is in line with Blake's belief that imagination is the artist's instrument for his own redemption, fighting the restrictions of reason and revealing unfallen, visionary nature behind the fallen forms of vegetable nature. Drawing his evidence (as amazingly few Thomas critics do) from the crucial Notebooks (1930-34), Williams detects the Blakean practice of identifying God with the body or Universal Man, the raising up of human experience into myth, the prophetic stance of the poet, the association of excess with wisdom, and the dual poetic energies of creation and destruction. According to Williams, the only significant facet of Thomas's poetics that has no source in Blake is his highly conscious awareness of language as the instrument with which imagination works at redeeming fallen nature and fallen man (see Chapter III, note 67, 107-20). Imagination itself as the crucially important faculty in Romantic poetic creation appears in some critical commentaries on Thomas's poems. Of these, two may be mentioned. In a Blakean reading of Thomas, called "Dylan Thomas' 'Naked Vision'," Edward Bloom identifies imagination as that faculty in Thomas's poetry which produces "a unique coalescence of experience and introspection" (Edward Bloom, "Dylan Thomas' 'Naked Vision'," Western Humanities Review, 14 / Autumn, 1960 /, 396). William T. Moynihan reads Thomas's statements on the poetic process as consistent with the function of Coleridge's Secondary Imagination, balancing opposites or resolving them into wholes (William T. Moynihan, The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas, Oxford Univ. Press, 1966, p. 52). Hoxie Fairchild also notes Thomas's Romantic search for a solution to the problem of subject-order relations, though Fairchild concludes that "for a modern romantic, objectivity and subjectivity are about equally difficult to maintain" (Fairchild, Religious Trends in Modern Poetry, VI, 1920-65, pp. 380-81). Fairchild also points out Thomas's Romantic use of Christian concepts for his own purposes: he / Thomas / was a romantic who employed Christian symbolism to lend a numinous aura to his interwoven beliefs in self-sufficient vitality, in sex, and in the creative power of poetry . . . Christianity represents by far the shallowest level of his many-tiered imagination" (p. 373). Finally, a very few critics have noted Thomas's emphasis on the redemptive power of love as a Romantic inheritance. Of these, the most important is Myron Ochshorn, who, in "The Love Song of Dylan Thomas," sees Thomas's whole poetic development as a quest for love: "This search for love is the dominant and binding theme of all his poetry. It is, in fact, the underlying theme of all the great Romantics . . . (Myron Ochshorn, "The Love Song of Dylan Thomas," New Mexico Quarterly, 24 / Spring, 1954 /, 50). Thomas Saunders, in an essay on Thomas as a religious but non-Christian poet, notes that "for Thomas, the great virtue was love, not sex . . . / love / possessed the key that could open all doors, even the doors of the unknown beyond death" (Thomas Saunders, "Religious Elements in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," Dalhousie Review, 45 / Winter, 1965-66 /, 496). Leslie Fiedler, in a review of The Selected Writings of Dylan Thomas (1946) makes a similar connection between Thomas's Romantic concern for love and religious values outside Christian tradition. Fiedler argues: "The subject matter of the bulk of Thomas's work . . . is the traditional subject-matter of Romanticism, the melancholy love that is less the love of human for human, than the love of love, and ultimately, the love of death, a kind of profaned mystery religion" (Leslie Fiedler, "The Latest Dylan Thomas," rev. of The Selected Writings of Dylan Thomas, ed. J. L. Sweeney, The Western Review,

11 / Winter, 1947 /, 105). To these critics one may add, in review, Thomas's own repeated characterizations of himself as "incorrigibly romantic" (SL 103, 129), a "crank and a romantic" (SL 22), a "middle-class, beardless Walt / Whitman /" (LVW 85), being "in the path of Blake" (SL 23), a worker from words like "a romanticist like Shelley" (SL 115), and his early goal to be "as good as Keats, if not better" (Life 65). Even one of Thomas's bravura pronouncements to the press during an American tour reveals a desire to separate himself from T. S. Eliot's tripartite pledge of allegiance to royalism, Anglo-Catholicism, and classicism. Thomas's parody of Eliot's three-part pledge was his own announcement as follows: "One: I am a Welshman; two: I am a drunkard; three: I am a lover of the human race, especially of women" (quoted in John Ackerman, Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work, Oxford Univ. Press, 1964, p. 1). Significantly, just before his suicidal death from an alcoholic insult to the brain, Thomas invoked his lifelong comparison to Keats, noting darkly that he had had twice as long as Keats as an active poet (Life 281). Lastly, as Kathleen Raine (and Gilbert Highet, above) notes, Thomas died at the point of crisis faced by Wordsworth in the Intimations Ode and Coleridge in Dejection: An Ode: "It was in the power of his genius to speak to the primitive sense of the glory of life that we all have in childhood, when body and soul live undivided, or body is itself a kind of soul. Wordsworth wrote of such experiences as recollected. Dylan Thomas uttered his youth from an experience still immediate, yet with a technique that a lifetime could not have improved. He died at the extreme point beyond which none may carry such youth" (see Chapter I, note 81).

CHAPTER IV

THE POEMS OF THE NOTEBOOKS (1930-34) AND THE POEMS OF 1934-36

The first three chapters of this study were an attempt to establish a framework within which to view Dylan Thomas's poetic development. Chapter IV now turns to Thomas's earliest poetry. This includes the poet's juvenilia mostly published in The Swansea Grammar School Magazine, the four crucial Notebooks (1930-34) that supplied most of the poems in Thomas's first two volumes, and the poems in these earliest volumes (18 Poems, Twenty-Five Poems) that have no ancestors in the Notebooks or which are radical and powerful transformations of earlier Notebook entries. Preliminary to this survey, I will first review the critical discussion of the problem of "periods" in Thomas's poetic development, the difficult problem of chronology in determining the nature of Thomas's development, the contribution of previous critics in drawing attention to a pattern of development in Thomas consistent with what Northrop Frye calls the Romantic myth, and finally, I will briefly discuss the history of Thomas's Notebooks as a whole.

Dylan Thomas's Poetic Development. The problem of identifying "periods" in a poet's work is similar in nature to the problem of identifying literary periods such as nineteenth-century Romanticism or twentieth-century Modernism. It can be argued that each poem a poet writes represents some degree of change in style and attitude, whether great or small. Conversely, it can obviously be argued that a poet's

entire canon is a single entity, a whole, each of whose parts is equally significant though not necessarily equally great. Finally, it is a difficult question as to whether identifiable phases in a poet's work represent poetic growth, decline, or simple change -- a question that inevitably uncovers the critic's assumptions about the nature and function of poetry and his adopted scale of values for measuring poetic achievement. Poets seldom "progress" in locked-step fashion from poem to poem; rather, like a stream in difficult terrain, they often twist and turn in upon themselves, collect in eddies, cut tributaries, or deposit isolated pools. Poets seldom present to the critic a canon that neatly fits the critic's simplified thesis, nor is this the case here. However, Thomas himself has left two helpful comments on his own views of his poetic development. In addition, Thomas's many critics display a surprising consensus about the general changes in Thomas's poetic concerns from the earlier to the later poetry. Most of these critical remarks are consistent with the argument of this study that Thomas's poetic development centers on the problem of the relation of self and world. However, few of these critics relate this pattern of development to more specific ideas and devices inherited from earlier Romantic practitioners.

The most authoritative comments that exist on the question of Thomas's periods of poetic development are two comments by Thomas himself. In a conversation in a New York bar with the critic William York Tindall, Thomas agreed with Tindall's division of the poetry into three phases: (1) a "womb-tomb" period that included the poems in 18 Poems (1934) and Twenty-Five Poems (1936), (2) a troubled middle period of poems about marriage and about war in The Map of Love (1939) and Deaths and Entrances (1946), and (3) a final "period of humanity" or acceptance

of the tragedy of the human condition in some of the later poems in Deaths and Entrances and in the poems of In Country Sleep (1952).[1] However much overlapping there might be between the volumes that make up these periods, there seems to be little doubt among critics that Thomas brought to fruition two major strains of poetry. The first strain is that of the early poems, originating mostly from the Notebooks, written in a packed stanza of intense, obscure imagery, making use of assonantal and consonantal rhyme, and concerned with the development of an assertive Romantic self, a development that culminates in the spiritual and poetic autobiography, Altarwise by Owl-light, the quest-romance that closes Twenty-Five Poems and which Thomas himself came to see as the ultimate development of the tendencies in his first major period of creativity (SL 178). The second strain of major achievement begins with poems in the Deaths and Entrances volume -- "Poem in October," "A Winter's Tale," and the volume's final poem, "Fern Hill" -- and ends with the three finished poem-sections of the projected poem In Country Heaven (that is, "In Country Sleep," "Over Sir John's Hill," and "In the White Giant's Thigh"), the final birthday poem entitled "Poem on his Birthday," and the "Author's Prologue" to Collected Poems. This second period of major poetry is one in which the Romantic self finds its true place in the role of priestly interpreter of nature and purveyor of the forces of imaginative perception and of love that redeem humanity from isolating self-consciousness and destructive rationality by revealing nature as a place of holiness. In the first period, then, the self often tends to assert its own centrality in relation to the entire cosmos which absorbs it or which it seeks to absorb; in the second period, the self seeks its own contentment and spiritual rebirth within particularized Welsh landscapes that contain the self as one of

various figures of authority, prophecy, or rebellion. In between these early poems of the assertive Romantic self and the later poems of regenerative landscapes falls what some critics call a separate period, often designated as Thomas's "dark," "troubled," or "transitional" phase. The poems in this middle period are the "marriage" poems and the "war" poems in The Map of Love and in Deaths and Entrances. What the marriage and the war poems have in common is that both represent serious incursions of what Thomas called the "exterior" world of "the others" into the "interior" world of the youthful Swansea poet. The central question posed by the problem of marriage and of armed conflict was whether the Romantic self's claim that it could govern its relation to the outer world was really valid. In seeking a way out of this dilemma, Thomas, in the quest poems "A Winter's Tale" and "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait" discovered the Romantic self's true task in the fostering of love and the praise of the spiritualized landscape in face of the threats to humanity and the natural world posed by the atomic bomb. The final task of the self, then, becomes the subject of the later poems. In Thomas's other preserved comment on the periods of his work, the poet's own awareness of the nature of his poetic development is clear: "The next poem I'll read /'After the Funeral'/ is the only one I have written that is, directly, about the life and death of one particular human being I knew -- and not about the very many lives and deaths whether seen, as in my first poems, in the tumultuous world of my own being or, as in the later poems, in war, grief, and the great holes and corners of universal love" (QEOM 137). Obviously, Thomas sees his own progress in terms of the problem of subject-object relations: a movement from a central focus on the self through a dark period of encounter with "others" ("wars/marital/ grief") to the discovery of a

power wider than the self ("universal love") that could contain it and could solve the problem of relationship. Nevertheless, although most critics would agree with Thomas (QEOM 130) that his earlier poems are "most narrowly odd" (subjective) and his later poems "wider and deeper" (objective), the poems in each period are centrally concerned with the problem of the relation of self and world.[2]

These designated periods in Thomas's poetic development are based entirely upon the published volumes of poetry. Unfortunately, the problem of Thomas's development became much more complex with the publication in 1961 of Ralph Maud's essay "Dylan Thomas' Collected Poems: Chronology of Composition" and with the publication of the four extant Notebooks themselves (edited by Maud) in 1967.[3] These two publications call into serious question not only all studies of Thomas's development published prior to 1961 and 1967 but even many studies published thereafter that chose not to deal with the implications of Maud's discoveries.

Dylan Thomas's Poetry and the Problem of Chronology. Prior to the publication of Maud's 1961 "Chronology" and his edition of the Notebooks almost all critical studies of Thomas's separate volumes applauded a trend towards "clarity" from the opaque poems of 18 Poems to Twenty-Five Poems and The Map of Love. While reading the drafts of Henry Treece's study of the poems, Thomas himself warned Treece that to claim for the poet a progress toward greater lucidity would be wrong. Using Treece's term for the clearly understandable poems ("the straight-poems") Thomas remarked:

> I thought the Straight-Poems chapter was convincing and concise. Do I understand, from your Eliot quotation at the head of the chapter, that the poetry in these straight poems is a calculated escape from the personality-parade of my loud and complex poems? I don't know if they are at all, and I really don't see how they could be. I wrote them, most of them anyway,

> quite a long time before the other poems in the 25 volume. The straight poems in 25 were, indeed, with a very few exceptions . . . written before most of the poems in the 18 volume. (SL 203-04)

Thomas goes on to say that he has many more Notebook poems which he will draw on for future volumes. A central point emerges from Thomas's completely candid remarks: most of the poems in Thomas's second volume (Twenty-Five Poems) were written before almost all of the poems in his first volume (18 Poems). In addition, about half of the poems in Thomas's third volume (Map) also came from the Notebooks, usually in versions written even before the Notebook poems that went into 18 Poems. Even in Deaths and Entrances two poems appear that have ancestors in the Notebooks of 1930-34. To make things even more complex, some of the poems from the Notebooks were published with little or no revision while others were radically transformed from their Notebook versions and only take on their essential character in one of the published volumes. Finally, Thomas was also writing entirely new poems after 1934 that owed nothing to the Notebooks. Thus, consulting Maud's tables of chronology in his 1961 essay, one finds that of the eighteen poems published in 18 Poems (1934) thirteen of the eighteen were written in their essential forms and entered in the August 1933 Notebook (the latest) whose entries extend from August 1933 to April 1934. Four of the remaining five poems were written in 1934 after the August Notebook was filled. Only one, "Especially when the October wind" (ca. 1932-33) is of earlier date. Thomas wrote incredibly slowly, spending days on a single line and months on a single poem, so when he was pressured for more poems for a 1936 volume he had no choice but to go back to the earlier Notebooks (the 1930, 1930-32, and the February 1933 Notebooks) to find poems to add to the six or seven entirely new poems composed in 1935-36 for inclusion in Twenty-Five Poems (1936). In fact,

at least sixteen (and possibly four more, extant in a typescript probably made from a "lost" 1932-33 Notebook) of the twenty-five poems in Twenty-Five Poems come from the Notebooks. Only five of the sixteen are from the now depleted August 1933 Notebook, while nine are from the February Notebook (entries from February 1 to August 10, 1933) and two are from the even earlier 1930-32 Notebook. However, unlike the poems from the August Notebook that were mainly revised only slightly for 18 Poems, at least three of the sixteen poems from the Notebooks are radically transformed in Twenty-Five Poems, and three others are substantially revised. In The Map of Love (1939), Thomas's third volume, seven of the sixteen poems (and possibly two more from the "lost" 1932-33 Notebook) come from the February, 1930-32, and in one case even the 1930 Notebook. However, even more so than was the case with Twenty-Five Poems, Thomas radically revised five and substantially revised one of the seven Notebook poems included in The Map of Love.

The lesson to be learned from this complicated situation is clear: no examination of the poems as ordered in the first three of Thomas's five major volumes can claim unambiguously that the poems, as ordered, show a clear, chronological progression in theme and style. Any examination of Thomas's poetic development based on chronology of composition must examine, in order, the following: (1) the juvenilia and the four extant Notebooks (1930, 1930-32, February 1933, and August 1933); the poems in the first three volumes that are either (a) radical revisions (i.e., essentially new poems) of earlier Notebook entries or (b) new poems composed after the end of the last Notebook; and (3) the poems in The Map of Love and Deaths and Entrances that are new and the poems in In Country Sleep (1952) as well as "Author's Prologue," "Elegy," and the framing poem for In Country Heaven, itself entitled "In Country Heaven."[4]

What are the implications of the complicated chronology of composition of Thomas's poems in relation to the published criticism of Thomas's poetic development? The Notebooks contain around 200 poems, versions of around 40 of which appear among the 90 poems in Collected Poems: 1934-1952. These numbers belie the first part of Thomas's own statement in the "Author's Note" to Collected Poems that "this book contains most of the poems I have written, and all, up to the present year, that I wish to preserve" (CP vii). Thomas wrote numerous drafts of most of the early poems and usually entered only a "finished" version in one of the Notebooks. Of course, as he matured and returned to the Notebooks he now looked upon these "finished" poems as "drafts" from which more sophisticated poems were made. In addition, a very few of these Notebook poems that were never printed in volumes or in poetry journals are first-rate and some second-rate poems or early versions of important later revisions are treasure-troves of information about Thomas's themes and his ideas on poetics. In spite of all this, no critical book has yet appeared since Maud's "Chronology" or his edition of the Notebooks that has examined Thomas's entire poetic output in proper chronological order from the first of the juvenilia through the last, unfinished drafts left at his death.[5] The chief defense of critics writing after 1967 when the Notebooks were printed is that the poems in separate volumes and in Collected Poems appear in an "aesthetic order" arranged and approved by Thomas.[6] Although this approach may be completely valid, it may be more convenient than anything else, in the case of Thomas. First of all, Thomas admits in his letter to Treece (1938) that there is "no definite sequence" (SL 204) of poems in 18 Poems and Twenty-Five Poems. Thomas further states that to examine the Notebook ordering of the poems in these two volumes to see if they "do genealogically work" could have "very curious results"

(SL 204). He also says that Notebook poems will appear in future volumes, again, "without considering an easily marked, planned, critical 'progress'" (SL 204). In truth, no critic has yet come forth to demonstrate, poem by poem, a significant aesthetic ordering of Thomas's volumes, especially since many of them were overly eager to see a drive for clarity in Twenty-Five Poems which was really a young poet's self-pillaging of less complex, earlier poems to meet an irresistible demand for a second book of poems. In the published volumes, Thomas seems to open and close with poems that are major efforts (Altarwise, "Fern Hill") or else are appropriate in prologue or epilogue ("I see the boys of summer," "Author's Prologue" or "All all and all . . ." and "Twenty-Four Years") but the poems in between do not seem placed in a definable sequence. On the other hand, a chronological survey of the poetry must avoid the error of seeing each poem as a point equidistant from all the points on a line of "progress" angling upward toward the region of perfection. Poets often return to earlier styles or work in several experimental directions at once. Only the theses of critics can contain the perfect schemata and seldom can all of a poet's work be included within that framework without the distortions of minimalization, overemphasis, and prejudicial interpretation. Nevertheless, in a study such as this, wherein the emphasis lies so much on the poet's developing ideas about the nature of the poetic process and the function of the poet as poet, a chronological survey seems appropriate, especially in light of the fact that no chronological survey of the poetry from beginning to end exists. Before turning to the juvenilia and the Notebooks, the impact of the chronology of Thomas's poems on the chief critics whose interpretations of Thomas's poetic development in terms consistent with Frye's "The Romantic Myth" must be examined.

"The Romantic Myth" and Thomas's Critics. In Chapter II of this study Northrop Frye's essay "The Romantic Myth" (1968) was examined as a mythological embodiment of the Romantic version of the problem of subject-object relations. Frye's main point is that the Christian pattern of Creation, Fall, and Redemption was displaced into secular terms by the Romantic poet who becomes his own Christ with the power of imagination and of love as his agency of redemption. The unity of being associated with childhood and nature corresponds to the Creation phase of the Christian pattern. The Fall for a Romantic is the growth of self-consciousness resulting in a sense of estrangement of the self from nature and even a division of the mental faculties within the self. Romantic Redemption becomes the drive of the self to regain unity of being by the exercise of imagination in the poetic process, either to establish the autonomy of the self or a reunion of the self with nature on terms congenial to the self. No critic of Thomas's poetry has applied Frye's essay to the poems; three critics, however, have discussed Thomas's poetic development in terms fairly consistent with those used by Frye. Crucially, only the author of a brief essay makes use of the Notebooks and thereby avoids the pitfalls in finding analogies between the three parts of the Romantic myth and the three phases of Thomas's poetry. Before beginning my own analyses of these poems, I will examine the findings of these three critics in order to distinguish their assumptions and conclusions from what I hope to prove in my final three chapters. These three critics are William Moynihan, Harry Williams, and Margaret Anne Hardesty.

William Moynihan has made the central contribution to a study of the Christian pattern of Creation, Fall, and Redemption in Dylan Thomas's poetry. In his 1964 essay "Dylan Thomas and the 'Biblical Rhythm',"

Moynihan builds upon ideas in Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (1957).[7] Moynihan's main contributions to the study of Thomas and Romanticism are his detection of the central role of imagination in Thomas's poems and his division of Thomas's poetry into the three phases of the "biblical rhythm": Creation (18 Poems), Fall (Twenty-Five Poems and The Map of Love), and Redemption (Deaths and Entrances and In Country Sleep). Although he says that there are poems of each phase of the rhythm in each of Thomas's published volumes, Moynihan still finds the emphases of the volumes, in the order of publication, parallel to the biblical rhythm. Moynihan also believes that each of Thomas's poems deals directly or by metaphorical implication with the three-phase history of the cosmos, of the human body, and of the poem. Moynihan's argument is excellent, but as it is often carried on by sustained generalization it leaves many of Thomas's major poems yet to be worked into the scheme of the argument. In addition, Moynihan leaves several interesting questions to be answered. Because of the dates of his study, Moynihan was unable to draw upon Frye's essay "The Romantic Myth" (1968) which details the specifically Romantic version of the biblical rhythm, which, as Frye shows in the Anatomy, pervades all western literature since the compilation of the Bible. As a result, Moynihan rightly sees Thomas's use of the myth as idiosyncratic, but he does not fully articulate the psychologizing or internalizing of the biblical rhythm as the keynote of the Romantic version. Similarly, he does not go so far as to see an analogy between the creation, fall, and redemption of cosmos, body, and poem as weighted in favor of the poem, the poetic process, or else the creation, fall, and redemption of man in the figures of Adam, Christ, and the Poet as weighted in favor of the Poet and his redeeming power of imaginative perception. In addition, Moynihan claims both that the order

of publication of Thomas's volumes roughly parallels the biblical rhythm yet also claims that the chronology of composition of the poems in no way affects the sequence of creation, fall, and redemption in the order of the separate volumes. However, as was pointed out in the review of the problem of chronology, almost all of the poems in Twenty-Five Poems and almost half of those in The Map of Love derive from early Notebooks and were published when they were, mainly because of the pressure of time and because of Thomas's slow pace of composition after the miraculous year 1933-34. Thus, the majority of the poems in the "fall" volumes (Twenty-Five, Map) were written fairly closely together before the "creation" poems of 18 Poems. This fact, reinforced by Thomas's admission that the chronology of the poems in the Notebooks probably held more interest for the critic than the generally unsignifying order in the first two volumes leads one to question Moynihan's contention that the "rough" parallel of the five separate volumes to the creation, fall, redemption pattern is as illuminating as it appears to be. His caveat that poems of each phase of the rhythm appear through Thomas's whole canon ought to be more vigorously emphasized. The presence of regeneration poems such as "From love's first fever" or Altarwise by Owl-light among the early poems or the presence among the middle volumes of creation poems such as "A saint about to fall" and "If my head hurt a hair's foot" or finally the presence among the later poems of fall poems such as "Do not go gentle" or "Lament" suggests that the biblical rhythm per se, although important, is a crucial tool of measurement only when applied in terms of the Romantic myth's more central concern with the self/world relation and the role of imagination in governing, if possible, this relation. The most significant analysis of Thomas as a Romantic, then, is, I believe, one that follows the evolution of Thomas's

ideas about the role of the poet, his powers, his problems, and his destiny in the search for an answer to the subject-object or self-world question, and answer which Thomas himself has called the differentiating characteristic of great art (SL 10). Such an analysis should uncover not only the specifically Romantic version of the biblical rhythm but also certain Romantic forms and devices such as the internalized quest-romance and poetical autobiography (Altarwise, "Ballad of the Long-legged Bait"), the greater Romantic lyric ("Poem in October"), crisis lyrics ("On No Work of Words" and others), and poems of encounter between a perceiving mind and a particularized landscape ("Fern Hill," "Over Sir John's Hill" and others). Appearing before Thomas's Notebooks and the Selected Letters became available, Moynihan's study can be greatly expanded upon; still, he deserves great credit for writing the first significant analysis of Thomas's debts to Romantic tradition.

A second key study of Thomas and Romanticism, Harry William's brief essay "Dylan Thomas' Poetry of Redemption: Its Blakean Beginnings," deserves special mention. Williams' essay is distinguished by the fact that it is one of only two essays published since 1967 that have made significant use of the Notebooks in studying Thomas's conception of the role of the poet and the nature of the poetic process. Like Blake, Williams rightly notes, Thomas was concerned with the "fall" of the self into self-consciousness, a fall represented by language, whose conceptual, abstracting nature separated man from a vision of unfallen nature. Paradoxically, language (poetic language) for Thomas also becomes the means by which man can redeem himself. Although Williams does not argue that such poetic language works by means of the Romantic metaphor -- polysemous, inner and outer, tenor and vehicle reversing themselves -- it is clear that the Romantic concept of imagination

lies behind Thomas's goals in the early poems. Williams partially corrects Moynihan's view of Thomas's poetic development, a view based on the seemingly apparent but actually deceptive ordering of the poems in the published volumes. Williams rightly sees the fourth and final Notebook, the August 1933 Notebook, as the final stage of the evolution of Thomas's early, assertive Romantic self. The stunning image and metaphor, says Williams, were to Thomas what a private system of myth was to Blake: a powerful construction of the imagination that could reveal the final form of the natural-supernatural universe. The only real drawback to Williams' essay is its brevity which necessitated the omission of many interesting Notebook poems as well as the omission of any analysis of the later fate of the early version of the Romantic self after its emergence in its most assertive, seemingly autonomous form in the August Notebook and in the Altarwise sonnets.

The third, final, and most recent consideration of Thomas as a Romantic poet is Margaret Anne Hardesty's unpublished dissertation (1973), An Examination of the Sacramental Vision of Dylan Thomas: Its Sources, Analogues, and its Expression in his Poetry. In the first half of her study, Hardesty outlines the history of dualism in Western philosophy and literature. Beginning with the Greeks, she traces the various manifestations of dualism (matter/spirit, time/eternity, real/ideal) in Western thought and art, and she reviews the proposals for resolving dualism into unity of being (what she calls "holism"). In the second half of her study, Hardesty examines Thomas's poetry in light of this tradition of dualism. She rightly identifies aspects of Thomas's poetics that are responses to dualism: the poetic symbol as sacramental sign, the desire for a union of the faculties of the mind, nature as a linkage between man and the divine, and, as Moynihan argued earlier, the

creation of a mythopoeic vision (creation, fall, redemption). Although she cites Moynihan on minor points, she fails, quite inexplicably to me, to credit him as the first to apply extensively the biblical rhythm to Thomas's separate volumes of poetry. Because of the twofold structure of her study, Hardesty does not discuss the crucial Notebooks nor is she able to test her thesis on a significantly large number of poems. Her claim that Thomas actually overcame dualism in the later poems is weakened by the fact that only two of the later poems are analysed in full: "Conversation of Prayer" (a virtuoso performance in style, but a minor poem) and "Poem on his Birthday." To her readings one must add readings of all the late, major poems -- "A Winter's Tale," "Fern Hill," "Over Sir John's Hill," "In the White Giant's Thigh," and others -- before accepting her views entirely. Actually, even Thomas's later poems are problematic mixtures of an intermittent reconciliation and an internecine dialectic of imagination and a recalcitrant world. Where Hardesty sees the central dualism as that of matter and spirit, I see it as that of self and world, the central dualism of Romantic tradition.

The reading of Thomas's poems which follows concentrates on what Wordsworth called The Prelude, the "growth of a poet's mind," as it seeks to define itself, its powers, and how, if at all, these powers may be exercised on the external world. Essentially, this study is an addition to the discussion opened by Moynihan, Williams, Hardesty, and, on some more specific points, by a few others. The remainder of this chapter is a survey of Thomas's earlier poetry. A general description of the Notebooks and critical commentary on them will be followed by an examination of important poems from the following groups: (1) the juvenilia, (2) the 1930 Notebook, (3) the 1930-32 Notebook, (4) poems from the typescript made from a lost 1932-33 Notebook and the February 1933 Note-

book, (5) the August 1933 Notebook, (6) poems written in 1934-36 that have no ancestors in the Notebooks, and finally, (7) the ten sonnets of Altarwise by Owl-light (1935-36), the culmination of the earlier poems.

The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas. Most of the significant information about Thomas's four extant poetry Notebooks is contained in Ralph Maud's introduction to his edition of The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas (1967). Maud points out that other notebooks have been lost, some very early pre-1930 notebooks and a 1932-33 notebook that would account for the seven-month gap between the end of the 1930-32 Notebook and the beginning of the February 1933 Notebook. In addition, Thomas, as editor of the Swansea Grammar School Magazine (SGSM hereafter), contributed some lighthearted, obviously "schoolboy" verse at the same time that he was filling the Notebooks with serious, experimentalist verse (N 11). As the Notebooks cover Thomas's fifteenth through nineteenth years, it is sometimes hard to distinguish "juvenile" from "adolescent" poems. In general, it may be said that extremely early poems that were not entered in the Notebooks contemporary with them are "juvenile" and were written without serious intent although some of them are still worth examining and many are now available in Jones's edition of The Poems. This rather striking "division" of Thomas's earliest verse into that printed in SGSM and that privately entered in the Notebooks and not shown to others at school tells us something about the conditions under which the Notebooks were composed during Thomas's adolescence (15-19) when he might well have otherwise been at university. Instead of obtaining a liberal education, Thomas concentrated all of his intellectual energies on developing as a poet. Isolated in rural Wales during a time when literary fortunes were exclusively made in London, Thomas lived a secret life in the Notebooks. Walford Davies cites three results of Thomas's isolation that appear in

the Notebooks: (1) a rejection of any codified philosophical or theological position in favor of an experimentalist attitude toward life, (2) a wariness of "public values" such as the chic political radicalism of the thirties as well as the conservative Welsh Non-Conformism in which he was raised, and (3) a tendency to reject the public voice in poetry for a more private use of language (something London residency might have discouraged) in building up his "poetic self" in the Romantic tradition (DTS: "The Poetry: An Introduction"). These Notebooks, then, must be seen as a central part of Thomas's career as a poet. To the end of his life, Thomas always returned to the locale of the composition of the Notebook poems -- rural Wales -- for inspiration and creative work. And Daniel Jones reminds us that the Notebooks were composed during the intensely creative "Warmley" period of his friendship with Thomas when the two made up an imaginary world of characters about whom they wrote music and stories (MFDT 35). Even more importantly, when Thomas sold the Notebooks in 1941, he did so in full awareness that he was coming to the end of a particular period in his poetic life, what FitzGibbon calls the period of the "boy-poet":

> Lyric poets change, or stop, or die. Keats died in his twenty-sixth year, and Dylan was twenty-six when he sold his notebooks. Nor do I believe that this is purely fortuitous coincidence. As a small child he had told his mother that he intended to be 'better than Keats,' and all his life that great poet was, as it were, the model against whom he measured himself. Shortly before his death he was to tell John Davenport that he was so tired: that he could not go on: that he had had twice as long at it as Keats. But now, in 1940, he intended to go on living, and writing. Therefore . . . the past must be shed, the boats burned. As he remarked to me once: 'It's lovely when you burn your boats. They burn so beautifully.' (Life 281)

The first substantial published commentary on the Notebooks as a whole was Ralph Maud's "Introduction" (1967) to his edition of these

poems (N 9-42). In Maud's view, most of the poems in the 1930 Notebook are derivative, a running commentary on the usual woes of adolescence. Influences are Yeats, Lawrence, Flecker, and the Imagists, and the tendency of the poems is toward what Maud wittily calls imagification -- the transformation of as much direct statement as possible into images. The 1930-32 Notebook marks the first appearance of unusual talent, for a poet of late adolescence. The poems of ideal love and aesthetic sensibility that dominate the 1930 Notebook give way around 1931 to poems of morbidity, death, the mephitic. This discovery of decay and its threats to the self were probably reinforced by Thomas's leaving school in 1931 to work as a reporter on a local paper, his duties including the inspection of bodies in the morgue and the investigation of the darker sides of Swansea life. The reporter's job also threatened to stamp out the just-emerging "poetic self" of the Notebooks, a threat which was averted by Thomas's quitting his job in January 1933 to devote eighteen months to nothing but the writing of poems. Thus, the developing "poetic self" won an initial victory over the impinging "exterior" world of work-a-day living. The February 1933 Notebook begins with the theme of morbidity and decay but counterpoints it later on with poems that seek to heal the division between the poet's inner world and the world outside. After trying and rejecting two possible attitudes of the self towards the world -- a sort of late aesthetic wryness and an Audenesque posture of social concern -- Thomas begins to develop the poetry of identity between the cosmos and the single self, to investigate the likeness of universal creation and the creation of the poem, the poet and Christ or God, and the redemptive power of the poetic "word." The August Notebook is a continuation of the themes of the later poems in the February Notebook and a building up of

a Romantic poetic self that seeks to resolve various antitheses -- growth and decay, despair and faith, waking and dreaming -- into a unity. The culmination of Thomas's efforts in the Notebooks is the post-Notebook sequence of ten sonnets, Altarwise by Owl-light, composed in the two years following the final entries in 1934 in the August Notebook.

In addition to Maud's characterization of the Notebooks should be added the commentary by Harry Williams, Raymond Hogler, and Kent Thompson.[8] Williams' essay was discussed earlier in another context, but Williams deserves additional credit for seeing the importance of the Notebooks in the development of a poetic self whose quest is to use language as a means of reuniting fallen man with nature in its visionary form. Raymond Hogler, in his essay "Dylan Thomas: The Development of an Idiom" (1972), argues that Thomas's contribution to Modern poetry is not so much his subject matter as a method of writing that, in itself, contains the central theme of Thomas's poetry: the desire for reconciliation of inner and outer worlds. Drawing on Thomas's letters and the Notebook poems, Hogler isolates "High on a hill" (1930-32 Notebook) as the first clear instance of the emergence of Thomas's style: powerful rhythms, heavy use of assonance and consonance, highly imagistic diction. What Hogler is also driving at but never quite formulates is that Thomas's ideal style (infrequently achieved) or "method" derives from the Romantic idea of a poem forged of polysemous metaphors, a seamless continuity between the events of the inner world of the psyche and those of an outer landscape. Thus, the poem "High on a hill" may be read as an early attempt to fuse the creative processes of nature, of human sexual love, and of poetry into one. Finally, in addition to Maud and Hogler, in Chapter IV of his dissertation, Kent Thompson devotes as much time as anyone yet has to the Notebooks as a whole and

to commenting on single poems (about ten). Thompson isolates three central aspects of Thomas's poetics emergent in the Notebooks: (1) that poetry is the language of images, (2) that even narrative poems are narratives of images (the image is the action), and (3) that these images must be original. As Thompson sees them, the major themes of the Notebooks are a questioning of the nature of the universe, the quest for truth through dream, the quest for an unfallen universe beyond death, the search of the self for immortality through the poetic process of creation, and a self-disgust born of self-consciousness. With such views on poetics and with such themes, Thomas, as Thompson concludes, had to place the exercise of imagination at the center of his concerns: ". . . the imagination was to be of paramount importance to the poet. In this, of course, he was clearly placing himself in the Romantic tradition" (Texas Dylan Thomas Collection 73). What Williams, Hogler, and Thompson have in common with Maud are the beliefs that the Notebooks reveal the development of Thomas's ideas about poetics, the development of a poetic self, and the display of the struggle of that self in confronting the outer world. The reading of the juvenilia and the Notebooks which follows is based on the assumption that an analysis of the early poetry as an effort to resolve the Romantic problem of the relation of perceiving self and perceived outer world will reveal the main line of Thomas's poetic development and will account for the presence of other Romantic traits and devices in both the earlier and the later poems.

The Juvenilia. The origins of a poet as a poet are usually as obscure as they are fascinating. In the case of Dylan Thomas, biographers cite the influence of Thomas's father, D. J. Thomas, an embittered schoolmaster and a failed poet, as well as Thomas's fascination with the role of the poet as a way of making up, among his peers, for a lack of in-

tellectual discipline in class and for his below-average size, even for a Welshman. Also, Thomas's extreme self-centeredness in the early poetry is sometimes attributed to his childhood environment created by a totally indulgent mother who seldom punished her son or denied him any request (Life 46; Ferris 49-50). This extreme self-consciousness, inevitably shocked by exposure to school and later to the working world, may account in part for the poet's concern with his "interior" world of imagination and its relation to the threatening outer world as outlined in the crucial 1935 letter to Jones (MFDT 38-45). In addition to the influences of home life, the world of imagination created with his friend Dan Jones, later a well-known composer of classical music, during the Warmley period of 1926-34 fostered Thomas's art in an otherwise uncongenial provincial environment. In his memoir of Thomas, Jones has recorded the events of the Warmley world, many of which have to do with word games of a "serious experimental purpose" -- reversing words, using a strange-sounding adjective before every noun, "hat" poems made up of lines on slips of paper drawn from a hat at random, and the composition of the "They" poems whose odd lines were written by Jones and whose even lines were written by Thomas (MFDT 24-28). In addition to the early influences of the Thomas home and the Warmley world, the entrance of Thomas in 1925 into the Swansea Grammar School gave the poet access to the Swansea Grammar School Magazine which he edited and largely wrote until his departure from school in 1931. With only two exceptions, no poems from the Notebooks appeared in SGSM; rather, Thomas composed school-boy satires, humorous pieces, or poems about nature, love, and death in nineteenth-century Romantic diction. Although several pre-1930 notebooks have been lost and Thomas's mother destroyed other juvenilia after her son's death, about fifty very early poems survive that do not

appear in the earliest two extant notebooks written concurrently with Thomas's tenure at school. Thus, there existed "two styles" in Thomas at the first, a fact that reinforces the idea that Thomas recognized a division between the values of the self -- revealed in the private Notebooks -- and the values of the outer world -- revealed in the "public" schoolboy verse with its conventional diction and the more public forms of satire, parody, the humoresque, as well as Thomas's early interest in two other public forms, the drama and the film.

In "Poetic Manifesto" (1951) Thomas provided a list of influences on these earliest of his poems. Describing these poems as "endless imitations" that seemed at the time "wonderfully original things," Thomas catalogues his influences as "Sir Thomas Browne, de Quincey, Henry Newbolt, the Ballads, Blake. Baronness Orczy, Marlowe, Chums /the boys' magazine/, the Imagists, the Bible, Keats, Lawrence, Anon., and Shakespeare" (EPW 156). To that list may be added, from Thomas's short story "The Fight," names from a list of pictures of poets in young Thomas's room: "de la Mare, Browning, Rupert Brooke, Whittier, and 'Watt's Hope' /Swinburne?/" and finally Daniel Jones's recollection that Thomas's father had a fine library almost exclusively of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry (PA 35-36; MFDT 16). Jones's memory is reinforced by Kent Thompson's discovery of books added to the Swansea Grammar School Library by Thomas's father: I. A. Richards' Practical Criticism and Principles as well as the poems of Morris and Swinburne in 1932, and works by Scott and Shelley in 1934 (Texas). Thomas's own early awareness of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American poetry is documented in a precocious essay entitled "Modern Poetry" (1929) that appeared in SGSM during the same years that the juvenilia was composed (EPW 83-86). For a Swansea boy of fifteen in

1929, young Thomas is extremely well informed. He is aware of Hardy, Bridges, various Georgians, Hopkins (whose experimentalist metres he sees as the origins of Modernist verse), Eliot, Joyce, Yeats (of the Celtic Twilight phase), W. H. Davies, the Imagists (Fletcher, Aldington), the three Sitwells, the Great War poets (Brooke, Sasoon, Owen, Graves, Grenfell), Lawrence, and Ezra Pound. The passing influence of many of these poets and of other poets since Blake can be felt in the juvenilia and in the two earliest notebooks. Such influences, however, were only incidental to the development of Thomas's own style. A reporter from a local Swansea newspaper reported in 1935 that young Thomas objected to being called a member of the Eliot-Pound-Auden school (sic): "'Eliot! Pounds! Auden!' the young man said in derision. 'They are back numbers in the poetical world.' Poetry moves swiftly these days" (Maud DTP 51). Thomas's own comment in the early "Modern Poetry" essay reinforces this refusal to accept the styles or themes of the Modernists and indicates his early awareness that the problem of Modern poetry is the search of the subjective poet for objective value outside his own desires: "No poet can find sure ground; he is hunting for it, with the whole earth perturbed and unsettled about him" (EPW 86).

Little of Thomas's early verse outside the Notebooks is more than derivative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets. However, even in a few of these efforts one can detect a significant Romantic influence. The juvenilia may be divided into the categories of comic verse, war poems, nature lyrics, poems on love and beauty, poems on poetry, and poems that involve the problem of relating self and world. The comic poems and war poems mainly serve to remind us that even during the years of the intensely private Notebooks Thomas was aware of public modes of expression (satire, elegy, ode) and was not averse to trying

to relate his poetic self to these modes and that the later comic writings (the stories, broadcasts, poems like "Lament," pub poems, and Under Milk Wood) were a delayed flowering of a part of Thomas's talent mainly suppressed from 1930 to 1939. The "Song of the Mischievous Dog" (P 221) and "Life Belt" (Life 57) are insignificant: the first an anapestic romp about real versus visionary animals and the second a satire on a boy (Thomas) who answers all the questions of his history teacher with the one date known to all British schoolboys -- "Ten-Six-Six." Slightly more important is "In Borrowed Plumes" (N 13), a parody of Yeats in the Celtic Twilight phase, filled with images of a deeply-colored, luminous outer landscape that encloses and reflects the self. The two war poems, "Best of All" and "Missing" (Life 53-54) are derivative of Rupert Brooke. The first of these is a catalogue of details from nature that the poet (probably 'at the Front') recalls. These are not Romantic "moments" of epiphany nor does the self seem troubled by its relation to them; still, the central emphasis of the poem is on the self and nature -- "These are the things I love." In the second Brooke-like poem, "Missing," the poet asks the sun, wind, and rain to conduct a pantheistic burial service over the body of a soldier killed in war. The poet assumes the Romantic role of nature's priest, directing a sacramental nature (the sun's "divine caress," the wind's whispered "benediction") to mourn the dead nature-lover.

Without references to the Great War, the other nature lyrics form the largest single group of Thomas's earliest poems. Some of these nature lyrics combine the ornate, precious diction of the Pre-Raphaelites or Aesthetics with the brief descriptive poem of the Imagists. Such a convergence of influences is not startling for both the late nineteenth-century poets and the Imagists dealt with subjective responses to ob-

jective events. Thomas's "To A Slender Wind" exemplifies the technique:

> Chrysolith they step,
> And on a jewelled pool
> Faint arrowy moonstone on a tear-culled cadence
> (P 225)

In other poems, the poetic self sees nature as numinous, the elms "all goddesses" ("The Elm") and the oak tree with its hidden "music" and its bark that "calls" ("The Oak" P 226). Another nature lyric, "Forest Picture" (P 221-22), echoes the language of Wordsworth's "Tis is a Beauteous Evening" ("Calm and strange is this evening hour in the forest") and Keats's "To Autumn" ("Summer is heavy with age, and leans upon Autumn"). Self and world unite in an image combining art and leaves ("Carven domes of green are the trees"). Nature is will and purpose. However, its reality is so intensely living that the lovers who walk among the visionary "fantastic avenues" are death-like -- "like shadows" -- a forecast of later poems in which nature's rampant vitalism overwhelms the self's desire for its own integrity. Three other nature lyrics involve characters other than the poet. The first, "To the Spring-Spirit," an evocation of the spirit of creation in the natural world, uses winter and spring as metaphors for isolation and unity of being: the poet and the Spring-Spirit are united by art ("We strangely sang") which causes the poet to lose his winter-sense of estrangement ("And I forgot the driftless foam, and sand"). The second, the delightful "In Dreams" (P 222-23), concerns the Romantic figure of the woman of ideal beauty with whom the poet seeks unity. Romantic images unite the perceiving poet, the flowers of the eery night garden, and the woman, in two Shelleyan lines: "Their pale, ethereal beauty seems to be / The frail and delicate breath of even-time." The iris-laden garden of night, governed by the moons of dreams, is a place of death, of rarefied

sensibility, of dream, or possibly an anti-natural garden of imagination (moon-governed). Imprisoned here, the woman cannot embrace the "rose" and the flower-opening sun, symbols of natural life. The garden/world, iris/rose, moon/sun, lover/woman pairings make this poem an early example of the self's attraction to and repulsion from the exotic, rarefied, or anti-natural life.

This poem is balanced by the third nature lyric with a character, "Idyll of Unforgetfulness" (P 223-24). The "Idyll" is quite obviously an imitation of Tennyson's "Ulysses," whose protagonist is a self-divided Romantic hero torn between public responsibility and private desire. The speaker of Thomas's poem is also a sea-voyager who tells us of his many encounters with strange places and with nature, rejecting land for the sea. Unlike Tennyson's hero, however, Thomas's voyager belies no compulsion about public responsibility. Rather, his "desires" and "imaginings" drive him onward over the sea with which he is united -- "I have known the mystery of the sea to be mantled about me" -- and the Romantic moment of epiphany when time tends to vanish -- "And my fingers have troubled the glass of the waters / And hours made little I have dipped my arms in their rapture." Finally, as in Tennyson's poem, here too the voyager hears the voices of sea beings from the sea bellowing him to come to them. Mysteriously called "they," these sea powers are eerily beautiful and deathly ("They of the pale, sea-wan beauty") and lure the voyager on with the dream of unity of being, the death of self-consciousness, and the final exhalation of desire. The "Idyll," though stylistically immature, is fascinatingly conceived as a poem about self and nature. Beginning with a Romantic figure who absorbs outer experience into himself as the fulfillment of his immense "imaginings," the poem ends with an unperturbed reversal of this relation in which the voyager, sati-

ated but not yet disgusted or bored with outer experience, now seeks to immerse the self in the outer world, urged on by the final lure of mysteriously entreating figures of beauty, death, and nature's numinous powers. Thus abstracted, the poem's pattern seems close to previous Romantic types. Like the "Idyll," other nature lyrics deserve some comment as early examples of the relation of self and world. The brief lyric "Of Any Flower" appears to be spoken by a flower but the poet might also be speaking the poem or be identified with the flower-speaker. The flower (and/or poet) interprets the natural world in terms of its own life cycle, using the "like" of simile to interpret nature in light of its own fate in growth and in death. If the poet is identifying with the flower, the employment of a form of metaphor (all four uses of "like" in rhyming positions) that links the life-cycle of the subject to the larger object that contains it prefigures later, more complex poems concerning the linkage of the self, the poetic process, and nature.

A similar but slightly better written poem is "You hold the ilex by its stem" (N 337-38). Here the ilex is imprisoned in the cycle of the sun that forces it to open and drives it through time. The poet, caressing the flower and lifting its head toward the sun, cannot reconcile the two ("The flower will not join the sky") although he identifies with the flower not the sun. An "oracle" had told him that flower and sun should lie close together and he must feel that it is his duty to enforce the oracle's prophecy; but he cannot, and, like it, is doomed to die. This poem, I think, is the earliest instance in Thomas of the problem that may face the Romantic poet: how the poet can realize the desire (the oracle) to reconcile the warring elements in nature, redeem the beautiful, and save himself. The last early nature lyric for

discussion is "Grass Blade's Psalm" (PA 36-37), incorporated into the short story "The Fight." In four stanzas of complex form (aabbc, two to seven stresses per line), the poet uses "frost" as a Romantic metaphor: an event of external nature correspondent to internal psychological changes in the poet himself, as these are transmitted through the speaker of the poem, a personified grass blade. With a willed playfulness as in Stevens' "Sea-Surface Full of Clouds," Thomas in each of the four stanzas describes the frost anew so that it matches the grass-poet's concerns: isolation, poetic vision, the growth of poetic genius, and the desire of the self to know and rightly interpret nature. Like "Of Any Flower" and "You hold the ilex," but with more complex images and with a polysemous metaphor (grass/poet), "Grass Blade's Psalm" prefigures the most famous poem of the entrapment of the self in natural cycles: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower."

A final group of juvenilia contains poems on love, one in part on poetry, on the separation of mind and nature, and the "They" poems co-authored with Daniel Jones. Two poems on love, of the most opposite kind, deal respectively with a poet's inner vision of ideal beauty and with necrophilia. The necrophilic poem appears in "The Fight" (PA 43) whose hero is Thomas as a young poet. A parody in part of Tennyson's line "Break, break, break on the cold, grey stones, O sea," the poem "Frivolous is my hate" describes the ravishing of a dead woman's body ("passion after death") in terms of a satanic mass, the breaking body of the woman being almost like the host. This poem prefigures the later "This bread I break," in which the poet assumes the role of Christ, offering his poetry of self (body and blood) to redeem the world. It also prefigures other poems that deal with unusual, non-rational states of mind such as "If my head hurt a hair's foot" whose

speaker is an unborn foetus or the later poem "In the White Giant's Thigh" whose necrophilic theme is the poet's desire to be united with the dead and barren women buried on a hillside. The second love poem, just recently printed, is the striking "La Danseuse" (Ferris 315-16). This poem deals directly with the problem of unity of being and the role of the poet who seeks an image that can resolve dualisms into unity. The poet sees a female dancer (what Kermode calls the ultimate Romantic image of unity) who is transcendent yet descends into the world to match the poet's desire to unite image and idea:

> Her form was like a poet's mind
> By all sensations sought
> . . . . . .
> One shape of lyric thought.

Like Keat's "ditties of no tone," the dancer appears with "A music that enamoured sight / Yet did elude the ear," and she resolves in her movements the same dualisms as Yeat's famous dancer: "Life in her keeping all was art, / And all of body soul." Yet although the poet's vision of the ideal woman or anima that can satisfy imagination is temporary, another epiphanic moment that passes, she remains a vision of the unfallen world that the poet seeks and her transient presence is a poetic inspiration and a token of hope that "awhile endowed / The darkness with a dream." An extraordinary poem for a young boy (Ferris labels it "written as a child"), "La Danseuse" is, in theme, a completely realized poem in the Romantic tradition and a foreshadowing of Thomas's more famous poem on a redeeming anima figure, "The hunchback in the park." Another recently printed early poem on poetry is "Inspirations" (Ferris 51). This poem deals with the problem of self and world as that of breaking out of the bonds of the self and the mind's rationalistic inquiries into the nature of things:

> The night is full of poetry and desire,
> And eager with unanswerable things;
> O that my beating brain could borrow wings
> And shake the shackles of the mind's attire.

To do so, the poet says, would enable "my songs" to overcome the sense of self-estrangement so that his "happy heart" (opposed to the "shackles" of mind) no longer questions but believes. This is the Romantic idea that nature (night) and the yearnings of the self (desire) can be reconciled through art (poetry, song) and the rejection of an estranging rationalism that impedes unity of being. Reversing the source of evil rationalism but still dealing with the problem of self and world, the young Thomas writes in "The Callous Stars" (N 341) of a mechanistic universe whose ordering principle is pure reason and which thus lacks sympathy with the human beings estranged within it. Written in terse tetrameter couplets, as self-containing as the cosmos they describe, the poem speaks of "clear-eyed, callous stars" in "appointed" positions from which shines "impartial" light. Should their "hard indifference" turn into sympathy for man as a creature of feeling and desire, the stars would "fail" and die. Thomas seems here to be saying that it is to be desired that a humanized, spiritualized nature be perceived, for man cannot be one with a world governed by cold, objective rationality. Possibly the longest delayed Romantic rejection of the Newtonian universe, this poem is a clear statement of the self-world dilemma but hints at no solution to it as do "La Danseuse" and "The night is full of poetry and desire."

Like all of these poems on war, nature, love, and poetry, the "They" poems co-authored with Daniel Jones (N 337-41) contain various Romantic traits. With Jones and Thomas spontaneously composing the odd and even lines, the series of experimental poems about unnamed figures called

"They" or a named figure "Azelea" are described by Jones as "the action of a god-like character ('He') or characters ('They')" (MFDT 26). Shrouded in the magnificent vagueness of their pronominal selves, these characters fulfill the dreams of the Romantic self. They descend from unfallen nature ("the coral hills") which is holistic ("the white sea fills / The soil with ascending grace") into the world of time where they unite language and landscape ("They will talk like tall trees") and teach that beauty and wisdom are one ("wise beauty"). They order nature by their presence: "The stars in their mouths are folded and white, / And the dust is like dew for their feet"; and "they cover the earth with their hair" while the voice of the nightingale becomes their own in "the rose of their throats." They are redeemers, waiting by the anemone tree of Adonis, suffering the pains of incarnation and bringing occult knowledge to the poet ("They mingle fair magic with me"). Similarly, the one poem from this group so far printed that has a single, named character (N 337) is about the sun-god Azelea who descends to redeem the "many" whose feet he washes with incense. What each of the "They" poems shares is a pluralistic hero or heroes in the Romantic mode: a hero, in his several persons, who descends from upper nature into lower nature (from vision to self-consciousness). His own form incorporates lower nature into it and he brings relationship, love, vision, and redemption to the dwellers in lower nature. Although by no means poems of any real merit, the "They" poems are an early example of the development of an aggrandized Romantic self whose story is contained in the four Notebooks to which I now turn.

The 1930 Notebook. Although written concurrently with the "public" SGSM poems and other juvenilia, the "private" Notebook poems represent a more intensely serious effort at poetic composition. Headed "Mainly

Free Verse Poems," the poems in the 1930 Notebook show the obvious influence of various poets and poetic schools including Yeats, Pound, the Imagists, and Keats. Almost all of the poems address one or another of the Romantic concerns reviewed in Chapter II and while some reveal the Modernist's loss of faith in Romantic affirmatives others recount the young poet's desire to achieve Romantic faith in the self, the world, and the imagination whose exercise in the poetic process might link self and world together. The poems in the 1930 Notebook will be reviewed thematically as follows: (1) poems dealing with the three possible relations of self and world; (2) poems that exemplify various Romantic poetic devices, attitudes, or forms; (3) poems that reveal the poet's concept of nature; and (4) poems dealing with varieties of love in relation to the quest for unity of being.

The first group of poems to be considered are those that deal with the tendency of the self to transform or to absorb the external, usually by way of the process of poetic creation. Poem 2, subtitled "(Based upon themes from Mother Goose)," seems to be about the fate of the poet who falls from the Eden of childhood (Mother Goose) into self-consciousness and thus desires a love that would heal the breach. The poet longs for a princess in a tower but to unite with her he must overcome a recalcitrant nature whose purpose is to thwart his quest for the maiden. Addressing his poem as a superior sort of nature, the poet places his faith in imagination:

> Good leaves, where shall we wander
> So that we may influence directly
> In the fanfare of the sun?
> (N 52)

As the transformer of nature, the poet is a redeemer figure, "a god from the stars," whose poetry alters the landscape and wins the love of the

princess in the tower (the anima in the mind?):

> Hammer your verses
> On the ground's dark crust,
> Print them on the sky's white floor.
>
> The princess from her turret watches,
> Clad in her gay net coat,
> Not to be refused . . .(N 52)

A less sophisticated, rhymed poem, Poem /12/, entitled "Orpheus" (N 62), shows Thomas interested again in the idea of the poet as one who has the imaginative power to alter the external world. The music of Orpheus' reed evokes a musical response in the birds and trees that rise to follow Orpheus as he walks and plays. Poem 11 (N 62-4) is a more original development of the idea of the poet's Orphic powers. Here, the poet takes two growing plants -- a cornstalk and a blue flower -- and speculates on how his imagination must operate to "free" the corn and flower from the restrictions of rational perception, of the laws of growth and decay in the fallen world. The poet speaks of "possession" and "obscure contact" that result from imaginative identity, the taking in of the blue flower into "my continent of strange speech" where it is invested with new powers. The poet says to himself that he must

> shape the corn
> Into a phalanx that satisfies
> The eye

and must "make /it/ mine." Words like "phalanx," "architecture," "columns," and "spire" indicate the fusion of art and nature that results in a cornstalk that grows up and up forever, freed from death and time. Even more so, the blue flower (blue because more fully informed by imaginative power?) is freed from its "spell" of mundane perception to grow and "hurt" the clouds that restrict our vision of the unfallen world. The poet is truly god-like here ("Shall I make more of you / Than the ghost from the grave?") and his blue flower becomes his own church

with "spire," "bell," and "arch" while the cornstalk is a ladder of love ("I will mount you upon resolute love") leading out of the world of merely rational perception. These three poems represent a vigorous effort to exercise the imaginative powers of the self upon the outer world; other poems represent the self's retrenchment against a world impossible to change. Poem 13 is addressed to an ideal woman, goddess or anima, whom the poet tries to entice inside his mind or the artifice of the poem "where the frost can never fall, / Nor the petals of any flower drop" (N 66). In Poem 30, the poet desires that the self should contain reality ("I want reality to hold / Within my palm"; N 85) while Poem 24 (N 77-8) rejects all imposed, external authority

> Let me escape
> . . . . . .
> and drown the gods in me

in order to live "self for self" and to see fallen nature as the false perception of reason -- "the sun" -- "pale and decayed, an ugly growth."

A second group of poems sees the relation of self and world in terms of the self's desire or fear of absorption into or oppression by the external world. Two poems present the alternatives of egotistical sublime or negative capability. Poem 27 is spoken by a bird (N 80-81), a favorite image of Thomas, in this case to be identified with the poet in the act of poetic creation. The opening lines, which contain the Romantic image of the correspondent breeze, reject the egotistical sublime for negative capability:

> When I allow myself to fly
> There is no sense of being free;
> Only the other loosening me
> Can send that voluminous delight,
> And make the wind that hurries by
> Keener to invigorate.

The bird's song, inspired by the breeze of imagination, in turn shapes nature: "My tree bows down beneath the lyric weight, / The leaves drop

down, a note on each." The bird, which has followed the sun (reason) now rejects the quest as futile ("His light could never make me see") and rejects reason as a pale shadow of some higher power ("And is an echo worth my constancy?"). Like Poem 27, Poem 23 (N 76-7) weighs in balance the opposing tendencies of self and world to absorb or transform one another. First, the poet argues, surrender to rationality ("light") leads to death ("pyramids") and imprisonment (the yellow bird that light forces to appear as yellow). In order to unite with his lover, the poet will exercise imagination ("Let me change to blue") and enter the being of the "other," the woman: "I'll make your shape my own, / Grow into your delicate skin." This "metamorphosis" will either break down the barriers the reason erects ("Spacing light") or will end in defeat for the poet, the return to habitual self from which another foray ("to break in thought again") must be mounted. The lover would then remain inaccessible in a "rock of sound" on which the poet-as-sculptor would futilely chip. Other poems are less ambiguous concerning the power of the external to transform the self. Poem 18 (N 70-71) seems heavily indebted to Keats's Nightingale Ode. The poet experiences a Romantic "moment" of loss of self-consciousness: "So I sink myself in the moment, / I let the fiery stream run." He becomes a garden in which the bird sits and sings, bringing such intense joy that the poet is "all but cut by the scent's arc" as in Keats's poem. The moment of unity fades ("the sorrow after") and the poet recedes into his habitual self; yet the departed bird retains its imaginative hold upon the poet and can transform him as it wishes:

> And, if you like, I ride
> A knight upon a golden horse,
> Or sit for you
> Or fly, or take the sea.

In Poem 28 (N 81-82) wisdom and strength are associated with the natural

world out of which the poet builds a "fortress" against modern urban culture which is ruled over by the ogress Lady Franckinsense: "Wisdom is stored with the clove / And the head of the bright poppy." Poem 36 also turns to nature, not as a fortress but as a source of images for "thought" that are superior to language. Recalling Keats's desire that emotion and thought might be one and Thomas's own remark in a letter "I think in cells," the poet here urges a listener to turn to nature to find the means of defining the poet himself: "You can express me / In wind, or snow, or sand."

A third and final group of poems deals with the relation of self and world as one in which neither self nor world dominates. In these poems, self and world may coalesce, stand opposed, be analogous. Often the self/world relation is presented in terms of an art/nature relation in which the self seeks to try to merge art and nature in a single entity. Poem 14 (N 66-68) is a meditation on the relationship between beauty in nature and beauty in human life. Any attempt to possess natural beauty can only lead to destruction ("Not touching it with our cruel fingers") for man and nature having inter-related but ultimately dissimilar beauties can never become wholly one. Still, natural beauty is an example and ideal to us, and in rare moments that beauty may approach us as we desire to approach it:

> We are too beautiful to die;
> All our life is bound to the green trees,
> And in the cithern evening
> The darkness is insistent,
> Loading a pleasure of love upon us
> In its great desire to overcome.

The "cithern evening" also recalls the Romantic wind-harp that conducts the inner and outer breezes of imagination and nature that unite the poet and the outer world. Similarly, in Poem 17, the poet uses images of earth, air, fire, and water as polysemous metaphors for one another to

create the impression that the four elements of nature are interchangeable and inter-related both with one another and with the poet himself as the creator of these metaphors. By breaking down the distinctions of rational analysis, the poet exalts his own position to that of the bringer of synthesis, relationship. On the other hand, some poems deal with the poet's inability to coalesce with the external. Poem 10 (N 60-61) addressed a lover who is a kind of female Proteus: her eyes can be the nightingale's, her voice the sea's but the poet's questing self ("my river") flows all around the stony lover without dissolving her into its waves. A spirit of nature, she is impervious to the self's desires either to absorb or be absorbed. Poem 8 compares the poet to a lion. The lion is "a balanced creature," at one with nature, while the poet is estranged, self-conscious, "frail, / Ascetic, unbalanced" (N 58), his love a "poor return" incapable of fostering unity of being. Similarly, Poem 19 (N 71) shows the poet contrasting the nightingale singing in harmony with nature to the poet who is oppressed by the sky and lacks the imaginative power to escape:

> Sky has not loved me much,
> And if it did, who should I have
> To wing my shoulders and my feet?

Though each nightingale is "a swan / Who sails on tides of leaves of speech." If the poet cannot fly to paradise, maybe he can lure an angel down into a Romantic inner paradise of the self. Thus, Poem 20 is in praise of the "cavern" whose dark walls (the skull) and "winged roof" (the imagination) are a sanctuary of the mind whose sounds are church bells that would lure a seraph inside. This cavern is called "my Jordan" which makes the poet his own redeemer and his imagination the bestower of grace. This inner sacred landscape must be constantly maintained against the outer "wind," for when the cavern collapses fear comes. Poem 16 reveals another aspect

of the "cavern" of the self, its cold response to external sensation or emotion and its spider-like imprisonment and devouring of anything intruding from without. Sunk in the torpor of Romantic ennui, the poet's "net" captures to destroy "the senses' thread" for "no love can penetrate / The thick hide covering." All received images, thoughts, or emotions tumble into the net of lethal boredom where they will

> lose /their/ freshness
> . . . . . .
> /In/ my exotic composure.

In a similar poem revealing the dark side of the self, Poem 41, the poet warns a listener that the rational dissection of the poet's thoughts will not lead the listener to a true understanding of the poet's nature. Only the perception of the poet's "images" taken over from the outer world can reveal the poet, but these images are dead, killed by being stripped of their external meanings and made slaves to the poet's Romantic desire for the creation of a complex, many-sided self:

> Have I to show myself to you
> In every way I am,
> Classic, erotic, and obscene,
> Dead and alive,
> In sleep and out of sleep,
> Tracking my sensibilities,
> Gratifying my sensualities. (N 97)

The poet does not always, however, see the artist as inevitably ensconced within his own "cavern" or image-killing sensibility: sometimes the poet's art and the external world seem intertwined.

Poem /9/ is a cancelled rhymed poem probably transferred to a lost notebook of poems in traditional forms. Though unexceptional, it is an early example of Thomas's Romantic ideal of reconciling art and nature as products of imagination identical in kind if not degree. Poem /9/ (N 58-9) describes a "power" in nature that has the traits of an art -- the dance -- from which discipline comes the archetypal Romantic image

of the dancer. Here, night conducts a "measure" of a "sweet-footed dance" and a boy provides an "image" of joy as the poem's own measured anapestic stanzas (ababcc) become one with the universal cadences. A more sophisticated poem on art and nature is Poem 7 (N 56-8) "On Watching Goldfish." Observing goldfish swimming in a bowl, the poet tries to establish an analogy with the poetic process. The bowl is art, the poem (Thomas called his poem "watertight compartments"), water is nature and/or the unconscious mind, and the exotic fish are the poet's beloved images that make up his poems. Although slightly unwieldy, the analogy's general intent is clear enough. The poet braves the terrors of the sub-rational mind to procure his images:

> Tragedy, tragedy, tragedy, I repeat,
> The sea is my enemy.
> But here are still the goldfish.

Like the images of a poem that the poet longs to change into external objects, the fish long to leave the bowl and the restrictions of their nature:

> The fishes have an envy
> . . . . . .
> To ascend, sail, parallel the sky
> In a motion of adventure

(Thomas once called his poems "flying-fish islands"). Yet in the end, the fish-images remain exotic, apart from nature, something to cultivate like an aesthetic sensibility: "Feed them on seeds, / Change their water." Three other poems deal with love for a woman who may be a product of nature or of art. Poem 21, "Woman on Tapestry," is about the poet's ambivalent reaction to a beautiful female figure, woven in thread, who is exotic yet an artifice. The woman has "woven hands" and the green trees behind her have "silken branches." However, the woman does not remain simply a figure of art; she becomes a dancer and steps down from the

tapestry into life. After praising "the clean faith of the body" that is their love, the poet returns the woman to art, this time a poem of his own -- "I have made an image of her / With the power of my hands" -- from which she can apparently be evoked again into life by the power of love.

This idea of an ideal woman who wavers between the status of nature and art is also the subject of Poem 33. Here, the poet addressed a real woman who has been transformed into an ideal by the poet's imagination. Thus, he says "I bought you for a thought" and calls his mind "your panopticon" or distorting mirror that makes the woman over to suit his desires. Within his mind, however, a purely ideal woman, "some mental doll," argues that she is superior to the real woman, for the doll is a pure creation of imagination ("automatic me"). The poet remains true to his "creation," the real woman, who is equally a prisoner of the poet's conception of her. As with Poem 21, here too the poet seems more satisfied with a love that partakes of nature and of art than either a purely human lover or an aesthetic image of the mind. The third poem of this group, Poem 39 /"Cabaret"/, returns to the image of the dancer as a symbol of ideal love. At first, the dancer appears as a tiny, fairy-like creature in the hand of the poet who imagines her: "I, poor romantic, held her heel / Upon the island of my palm." Later, she seems to become a cabaret dancer (Thomas cancelled the original title) and leaves the poet's palm for a dance-hall stage. There, her legs kick out so fast that she seems to have an insect-like "twelve-legged body," an effect that leads to the final four lines of the poem which are reminiscent of Keats's Grecian Urn and Nightingale Odes as well as Yeats's Byzantium poems:

I, poor romantic, contemplate
The insect on this painted tree.
Which is the metal wing
And which the real? (N 95)

Although a somewhat disorganized poem, Poem 39 does raise quite clearly and directly a Romantic problem: what is the nature of the imagination? Does it create or is it illusory? Where does ultimate reality lie -- in art or in nature? Here, all we know is that the poet first encloses the woman within the self (his palm); then she releases herself and separates, leaving the poet in doubt about the nature of his perception of her.

In addition to these poems about the three basic relations of self and world and the poems about the relation of art to nature, some poems in the 1930 Notebook deal directly with the theme of the power of imagination and its corollary, a rejection of pure rationalism as a desirable mode of apprehending the world. Some poems dealing with imagination such as Poem /12/ and Poem 16 have been discussed in another context. Several other poems in this group, however, also deserve mention. Poem 22 illustrates Thomas's statement in the letters that imagination is destructive as well as constructive, breaking up what is commonly perceived in order to reshape. The poet sees a temple in which a raven is imprisoned and a stilled boat on whose mast a magpie sits. With possible ancestors in Kubla Khan's pleasure dome and the ancient mariner's ship, here both temple and boat are shattered, killing the raven and the magpie that seem symbols of imaginative power restricted by religious form (the temple) or a failed quest (the stilled boat). Rejecting a weak form of union with the dead birds ("Pity is not enough") the poet calls for new embodiments of imagination:

Temple's broken and poor raven's dead;
Build from the ashes!
Boat's broken, too, and magpie's still;
Build, build again! (N 76)

Poem 38, a second Orpheus poem, addresses the problem of incarnation, the ideal existence, in the mind, of myths and the problem of their embodiment is the world of sense. Orpheus and Artemis, as lovers, walk into "the void of sense" where Artemis' former "heroic" acts (shooting an eagle with her arrow, the seduction of Endymion) are impossible, mere "lies" of imagination that the poet loves. The obliteration of imagined ideals in the external world turns the poet into a dying drunken clown and Artemis into a "trull" with "rotten breath" living in the "drain of sense." In spite of this despair, some cancelled lines at the end suggest Thomas's later movement toward a reconciliation between imagination and the world of sense: "sense she has wings / and is just as sane." Such a reconciliation is the subject of a fine early poem, Poem 12 ("We will be conscious of our sanctity"; N 64-66). This poem is spoken by flowers which have been cut free from the bonds of space and time (cf. Poem 11), but these flowers also imitate the state of being of men similarly freed by imagination. In this polysemous analogy, both flowers (and men) are sacramentalized: "sanctity," "holy leaves," "our divinity." Imagination in the form of a bird loosens the flowers:

> We do not concern ourselves
> . . . . . .
> Waiting for the bird who shall say,
> 'I have come to elevate you.'

As in Poem 17, imagination abolishes the distinctions between earth, sea, air, and fire, so that the flowers "burrow" into the air whose dragonfly and swordfish swim together in a single element and a mermaid (uniting the human and the natural) holds hands with an otter. The flowers and man evolve, rising in consciousness into a "new country" -- nature in its unfallen visionary form — past the "blind clouds" of the rationalist's nature into a knowledge of "a great divinity / And a wide sanity" that is

man, nature, and the divine linked by imaginative perception. The achievement of "wide sanity" by the union of imagination and the outer world is the subject of Poem 42 ("How shall the animal"; N 97-99), the final poem in the 1930 Notebook and the only poem from this notebook that Thomas later revised (heavily) for inclusion in a later volume (Map, 1939). The "animal" which is the subject of the poem may be a figure of a female dancer as anima (such a sketch appears in the margin opposite this poem) whose embodiment in an image changes anima to animal, or it may also be a bird or horse, all of which appear in the poem and all of which are traditional symbols of the power of imaginative, poetic creation. The "animal" or reconciling Romantic image which the poet must "trace" in his poem originates in the "dark recesses" of the mind. However, the poet fears that the image cannot

> Be durable
> Under such weight as bears me down
> The bitter certainty of waste.

This "weight" which he associates with "my bantering Philistine" is a composite of reason, inherited moral authority, and the external world untransformed by imagination. The poet's images are too impermanent to change the outer world: "I build a tower and I pull it down" and his bird figure "has no flesh or bone." Attempting to realize the anima in lovemaking with a real dancing-woman, the poet becomes a Christ nailed to the cross of opened female thighs ("A cross of legs / Poor Christ was never nailed upon.") Finally, the poet wonders how dancer, bird, or horse can exist as realized symbols once the poet dies. Using his code word of imagination -- "magic" -- Thomas, to borrow Wallace Stevens' terms, finds the pressure of reality too much for the pressure of imagination:

> I try to hold, but can't,
> Compress, inflate, grow old,

With all the tackle of my certain magic
Stone hard to lift.

This poem, clearly, seems a "dejection ode" in the Romantic tradition: a mourning for the failure of imagination to transform the outer world or our perceptions of it.

Even though imagination may often fail, the poet stands firm in his opposition to rationality as a mode of knowing that should govern man's perception of the world. As in several poems examined earlier, Poem 9 (N 59-60) associates the sun and sky as symbols of tyrannical reason and the imprisoning nature it perceives. Here, self-consciousness ("I am aware") leads to a sense of separation between man and nature. Unlike the rain, the sun showers destructive rays on the flowers. The sun is reason, deathly sophistication, tyrannical authority: it possesses "loud fastidiousness," it is "studying the earth," "urbane," "independent and vast," a "king" in his palace, "Sunday all the week." Similarly, Poem 23 associates the "light" of reason with death ("pyramids") and an enchaining yellow color opposed to imagination. Poem 27 tells of a bird who follows the sun in hopes of breaking the chains of its fallen form but decides at last that the sun is but an "echo" of some larger power and unworthy of "constancy." Poem 38, decrying the fall of Orpheus and Artemis into "sense," speaks derisively of the "calculated sea" as measured by reason. But the most sustained anti-rationalist poem is Poem 26 ("And the ghost rose up to interrogate"; N 79-80). In this poem an unidentified ghost (his higher poetic self?) chides the poet for creating images according to a rationalistic reduction of the principle of the egotistical sublime. The poet has taken a leopard from nature, imprisoned him in an image, and has given the animal his own human smells. This mechanistic approach is condemned by a peacock, image

of beauty and unity of being, who scolds the poet for his mechanistic way of writing, a way that reinforces the view of a mechanistic nature which the peacock is trying to escape from. The peacock's luminous wings "saved the earth" in darkness. If the poet will use negative capability to unite with the peacock, he too can be saved from the rationalistic universe. Should he not do so, the peacock would depart:

> You do not understand,
> March as you do,
> Mechanically, with deliberate steps,
> And there's an end to me."

The peacock calls animals and flowers to climb "the bright and hundred-coloured stairs" to unfallen nature and thus to abandon the mechanistic universe: "The wheels revolve, wheel within wheel, / Shining and multiplex machines" that never alter their rhythm in a "hollow perfection." The peacock's warning converts the poet who now condemns a rationalistic mode of creation in poetry and in the universe. Instead, he praises "the grotesque, / The peacock and the gillyflower" though such praise does not immediately alter the mechanist's world where still "the wheels go round and round."

The poet's concern in Poem 26 with nature as visionary or mechanistic is reflected in a group of poems in the 1930 Notebook that embody the poet's various attitudes toward the external world and his relation to it. Sometimes Thomas sees nature as a place of vitalistic, primitive energy where human self-consciousness does not disturb the harmony. For instance, Poem 8 (N 58), a Lawrentian beast poem, expresses a desire to be like the lion who is "balanced," has a "clean" mind without superfluous vanity, and who is a "vital, dominant creature," unlike the "unbalanced," "frail" poet. Natural vitalism may be a part of love, as in Poem 21 where the woman on tapestry draws sexual energy from nature:

So the ilex and the cypress
Mix their wild blood
With yours. (N 75)

In at least one instance, however, Poem 40 (N 95-6), the primitive world of nature appears macabre if not actually threatening. The frivolously innocent joy of Christmas Day is contrasted with the life of mice, moles, and "salamanders," the last of which lurk outside in a subterranean lair that the poet calls "the room behind the blinds." Also, as noted above, nature can be an active antagonist in its rationally perceived form: the sun reigning as tyrant over imagination (Poem 9) or an entire mechanistic cosmos fostered by a rationalistic mode of poetic composition (Poem 26). More often, nature is seen as an object for imaginative redemption or as a desirable object for union with the isolated self. As an object for redemption, nature in its fallen form is released by imagination in the poem on the endlessly growing corn stalk and blue flower (Poem 11) or the similarly unlimited expansion of the sacramental trees (Poem 12). The poet's ability to discuss one aspect of nature in terms of its opposite, that is, metaphor, seamlessly stitches together the four elements of the world as in Poem 17. A dejection ode, like Poem 19, laments the failure of this power to link man to a world of beauty symbolized by the nightingale who "sails" in the watery luminosity of the trees. Poem 42 is also a dejection ode, as shown above. As an object of union, nature appears desirable even in its present fallen form but may or may not exclude the poet from itself. In Poem 10 the poet's lover possesses the power to "become" the nightingale, sea, river, or shell all of which transformations enhance her power and allure. In Poem 27 (N 80-81) an outer breeze stimulates the inner, correspondent breeze of imagination while in Poem 28 we are told in Wordsworthian fashion that "wisdom" may be learned from poppy and clove.

Similarly, in Poem 37 (N 92-3) the poet contrasts the sterile, rational use of language in a school classroom and the compliant schoolboys to the winter light outside which is "realler" than the faces of the subservient boys. They are "unreal / Beside the river of the flowing sun." Union with nature, however, is often hard. In Poem 26, discussed above, the poet is locked in a mechanistic universe from which the peacock escapes while in Poem 14 (N 66-68) nature remains beautiful only so long as man refrains from defiling it with his rapacious desire for possession.

Several of these poems on nature link the virtues of the natural world with the poet's quest for a love that would bring release from self-consciousness. In the 1930 Notebook love appears as pure sensuality or mundane human love, as the poet's anima or its dark reverse, the femme fatale, or as an agent of redemption. In a young poet not quite sixteen one would think naturally to find poems on sexual love as a splendid means of overcoming the division between the self and the human other. Thus, Poem 15 (N 68) describes the sexual act as the weighing down on the girl of the poet's "ponderous flower." Poem 35 (N 91) argues that neither randy nature-spirits ("O goat-legged wind") nor the gods are as worthy of sexual love as the poet whose "logical" right it seems is to touch her "sweet inductive thighs / And raven hair." Such sexual union is important because it overcomes division and is the means of re-entering an Arcadian world. In Poem 31 (N 86-87) the lovers represent two worlds, "her world" and the "centre of mine" that converge in love's flames: "Thus is the contrast made." The poet chides others who bypass sexual love for a direct experience of divine love. Such persons look for a goddess but find a siren, for a god but find a leman, while the poet and his lover "pass over the golden fields" of Arcady into which they have ascended by sexual passion. Thomas seems fascinated by the

relationship between sexual love and other forms: divine love or the love associated with the sympathetic power of imagination. Poem 5 (N 54-55), for instance, detects the limits of sexuality -- "your breasts and thighs and navel are not enough" -- and seems to turn to imagination as a higher form of love:

> let me find a new medium,
> A new method of intercourse.
> Let me dispense with the animal:
> The animal is not enough.

The involvement of imagination in the search for higher forms of love is evident in poems concerning a figure that may be an ideal woman, the anima, a goddess, or the darker figure of the fatal woman. Several poems mentioned earlier contain such figures. Three poems, Poems 21, 39, and 42 contain the Romantic figure of the female dancer who unites art and nature, spirit and body, pattern and embodiment in one. Poem 13 apparently invites an Egyptian goddess ("Oh, eagle-mouthed") into the poet's inner world while Poem 20 invites an angel, a seraph, to enter similarly a cavernous Jordan of the imagination. Poems 10 and 38 take opposite attitudes toward the union of the poet's lover or anima with natural powers, the former seeing the lover-anima as drawing strength from nature and the latter bemoaning Artemis' degradation from myth into the material world. In Poem 2, the princess in the tower inspires the poet to reshape a recalcitrant nature by hammering verses into the ground and printing them on the sky. In addition to these poems, two longer poems not so far discussed are early examples in Thomas of the Romantic love-quest whose end is unity of being. Poem 1, "Osiris come to Isis" (N 47-50), is a fine example of the Romantic fascination with strange states of consciousness. As is well known, the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Isis ends with the murder of Osiris by his brother Typhon, the two recoveries of Osiris's remains by Isis, the final burial, and the trans-

ference of Osiris's soul to the sacred bull Apis in which it resided for the lifespan of each earthly bull that housed the divine Apis. In Thomas's poem, we identify with the consciousness of Osiris encased within the body of the bull who wades in the edge of the Nile. As he swims down the Nile, thinking of Isis and of his desire for union with her, we anticipate a union of divinity (god and goddess), the animal (bull and cow), the whole natural world (the Nile, scene of the union), and the human (the deities' former human forms.) Thus, Osiris-Apis mounts his Isis-cow in the shallows of the river:

> Seeking perfection underneath
> The river's hot, unwholesome breath
> . . . . . .
> Twining his body in anemones.

As the Prometheus-like Osiris brought the gifts of civilization to man not by war but by the power of his music and elegant speech, he may be an artist figure in Thomas's poem, questing after a feminine ideal that unites nature, man, and the divine in their act of love. A second love-quest, Poem 29, is called a section from a longer poem to have been called "Hassan's Journey into the World" (N 82-85). This poem is, like Poem 1, a water journey, this time by sea. Written in short lines whose rhythms echo the ballad meter, Poem 29 has a family resemblance to Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." It is an exotic voyage on the Arabian sea by Islamic sailors who seem to intend to appropriate religious values to themselves ("to . . . take the bright minaret") and who experience the spiritual torpor of a world stripped of its numinous presences:

> The world was tired, tide on tide
> Falling below our boat
> With slow deliberation.

Though "outcasts" in their Romantic voyage, they see a "water-lass" (nature-spirit/anima) rise from the ocean to satisfy their desires. Like

the albatross (mentioned by Thomas in the letters), the water-lass blesses the voyagers: the clown passes into the dream-world while a speaking turtle is awakened "to every spark that kindles love." Like the ancient mariner, the chief voyager, Hassan, recognizes too late ("Hassan had waited too long") the significance of the water-lass as a power of love and nature. As she melts back into water, Hassan calls her "my Aegis," as if she were the anima, and touches her "snowy hand" that fades. Hassan, like the mariner, will receive a chance for atonement -- "Goodbye, my Aegis, but remember / This is not your last visit" -- a chance realized many years later in Thomas's poem "A Winter's Tale" where the poet unites with a she-bird figure of ideal love or the anima who "rose with him flowering in her melting snow" (P 191). In contrast to these females, Poem 6 (N 55-56) presents the single example in this notebook of the femme fatale who lures the lover-quester into destruction. Like the girl in the short story "A Prospect of the Sea," here a woman who calls herself "Lilith" after Adam's first wife leaves the poet with unfulfilled desire:

> You are too strange I said
> Into the pale shell of her ear,
> You bewilder me with your strength,
> You hurt and do not reward.

Lilith, like the femme fatale in Keats's La belle dame sans merci, leaves the poet yearning for completion. In addition, she is a Medusa:

> And her lips were the reddest of berries
> Which poison the mouth at a touch
> And her hair was a circle of snakes.

Still, most of the love poems in this notebook see love in its various forms as a way of overcoming separation. Nature itself as a conductor of the divine is "loading a pleasure of love upon us" while the poet himself, having by imagination caused the corn to grow beyond the clouds,

will "mount /the stalks/ upon resolute love" (N 63) into unfallen nature.

This pre-eminence in the 1930 Notebook of imagination as a healing power introduces a final concern: the presence of other Romantic poetic devices, attitudes, and forms in these poems. Too tedious to document in full, only a few of the more striking representative examples will be mentioned here. The poet as hero of his own poems appears in Poem 1, Poem 2, and the two Orphic poems (/12/ and 38). In Poem 42 ("How shall the animal") the poet is Christ nailed on an erotic cross of thighs. The displacement of religious values into a secular context also appears in the sacramental trees of Poem 12, the inner Jordan of the imagination in Poem 20, and the appropriation of the Islamic "minaret" by Hassan and his "outcast" voyagers in Poem 29. The epiphanic moment of insight is strikingly illustrated in Poem 18 where the poet will "sink myself in the moment," in Poem 22 where the impulsive "minute" of the exerted will is superior to the "wise hour" of reason, in Hassan's failure to seize the moment of vision of the water-lass in Poem 29, and in Poem 20 where a darker epiphany ("this vicious minute's hour") brings knowledge of man's seemingly eternal entrapment in time. There are also many "poems on poetry" whose subjects are the various aspects of the poetic process itself. The most nature of these are probably Poem 42 whose theme is the difficulty of imposing imaginative order on nature and Poem 7, a meditation on the relationship between art, the unconscious, and nature. As noted above, there are also poems in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode (Poems 16, 19, 42) and two quest poems: one in ballad-like lines (Poem 29) and the other a poem employing Egyptian myth to illustrate the unity of being which is the usual goal of Romantic quest poems.

From this examination of Thomas's 1930 Notebook the following conclusions may be drawn. Many of the poems are derivative of antecedent poems, poets, or styles, from the early nineteenth-century English Romantics through Yeats and the Imagists. As the work of a fifteen to sixteen year old Swansea boy in 1930, they are remarkable, especially in their sophisticated (for such a boy) concern with the nature of the poetic process and with the problem of the relation of the poetic self to the outer world. Judged in the light of the best poetry since Blake, none of the poems are striking enough in style or thought to be ranked above the mediocre. However, as part of the history of Thomas's own poetic development, they reinforce the view which the juvenilia also supported: Thomas's deepest affinity is with the Romantic poetic tradition in the nineteenth century as well as with the transformations of this tradition by its Modernist inheritors.

The 1930-32 Notebook. All of the themes of the 1930 Notebook continue in the 1930-32 Notebook which immediately followed the composition of the former. Maud comments (N 17f.) that somewhere in the middle of this notebook emerges Thomas's most characteristic early style, a style which I would describe as one containing a dense, packed line, heavily rhythmical, a catalogue of arcane images which often seek to become polysemous metaphors for three simultaneous processes: nature, sex, and poetic creation. Besides this emergence of a more sophisticated style, what distinguishes the 1930-32 Notebook from its predecessor is the poet's increasing awareness of the necessity and yet supreme difficulty of exercising the imagination in poetic composition in order to govern the external world on terms congenial to the self. A growing sense of deathliness in nature as well as a sense of the multiple faces of love -- sexuality, necrophilia, the ideal woman or anima -- and the

relative failure or success of these forms in redeeming the self from isolation are also major themes of the second extant notebook. Finally, it should be noted that in this notebook we encounter a larger number of poems that Thomas later revised radically for inclusion in volumes as late as 1946. As noted earlier, the procedure to be followed here is an examination of the notebook poems as finished versions in themselves for the 1930-32 time period; radical revisions will be discussed separately in Chapter V and VI when necessary to the argument of this study.

The problem of the relation of self and world remains the central issue for the poet in the 1930-32 Notebook. Although some poems will perceive the natural world as a desirable home for the self, more poems are dark meditations on the deathliness in nature and the corresponding efforts of the self either to exercise imagination upon nature or to consider an aesthetic withdrawal from the natural world into the pure artifice of the cultivated mind. Poem II ("To-day, this hour I breathe"; N 103-04) addresses the problem of the artist whose imagination, operating according to the same organic laws that govern nature, encounters recalcitrant objects that violate its own laws. In an epiphanic moment, the poet and nature are linked by the Romantic metaphor of the correspondent breeze by which internal symbol and external object are made one: "To-day, this hour I breathe / In symbols, be they so light, of tongue and air." Expanding time and space into eternity, this moment is threatened by a division between reason and imagination, what Thomas calls "sight and trust." Pure reason produces that which is anti-natural and anti-human -- here, an airplane or "iron bird" in opposition to those other birds in Thomas's poetry which are associated with poetic powers. The airplane flies "against joy" for it cannot be controlled by poetry, a fact that leads to sorrow just as would be the case

if

> sea /i.e., should be/ rare
> That does not imitate
> Boy with the voice, or tympani.

Ideas of order on Swansea bay! Unlike imagination that seeks out the ultimate nature of the universe, the rational iron-bird refuses the sun for its own narcissistic shadow and also comes into being by an organic process: "A butterfly before the chrysalis." Thus the poet, in a perfectly ambiguous statement, says that "the certain is a fable": that is, reason as a primary mode of discovering truth is only a myth and/or only by constructing its own myths can imagination know its own truths as well as those of the outer world. A similar poem, Poem XI ("Yesterday, the cherry sun") is an interesting contest between the poet as champion of the imagination and a mechanical singing-bird as champion of the rational or the artificial. Playing an Orphic guitar at his window, the poet actually controls the sun and its movement by his art:

> Yesterday, the cherry sun
> Hung in its space until the steel string snapped,
> The voice lost edge,
> And the guitar was put away

-- which caused the sun to set! The poet calls the setting sun "a silver dog, a gypsy's hoop" transforming it as it falls in a display of imaginative power. After his own effort is done, the poet, hearing "other tunes" that ascend to a newly risen sun, addresses the sun itself: these notes, he says, "Should make you glad; / Your face is pale." Then, in a striking theft from Yeats, Thomas reveals the source of the inefficacious, other song:

> The handle and the clockwork turn,
> But the nightingale
> Does not please the emperor.

Symbol of the purely rational (like the "iron-bird" of Poem II) or more

possibly aesthetic artificiality that rejects the natural, the mechanical nightingale is not the product of the organically shaping spirit of imagination. Amused and self-satisfied, the poet picks up again his Orphic guitar:

> I pluck again
> The sweet, steel strings
> To bring the sun to life
> . . . . . .
> The steel bird put away.

This control of art over the external is, however, not always so self-evident an activity. In "Upon your held-out hand" (N 157-58) Thomas equates poetic control of experience with absolute devotion to craft. Several of Thomas's friends have remarked on the poet's lifelong habit of counting syllables on his fingers with slow, intense deliberation. Here that habit is synecdoche for the poet's control of the "maddening factors" of the world that threaten his sanity and integrity. One such factor is a new insane asylum recently built above Cwmdonkin Drive: "the new asylum on the hill / Leers down the valley like a fool" in hopes of destroying the poet's art whose images leap over the counted rhythm like sheep over the stile of the insomniac. Whatever "sanity" may be, it lies with the poet and not with the often constricting outer world: "my version's sane / space is too small" (Poem XXIV, N 124). In response to this problem, a poem like Poem XLVIII ("Sever from what I trust"; N 143) distinguishes between "sense" or the enforced reception of outer stimuli and "love" or the enforcing dispatch of desire into the outer world. A miniature embodiment of the Romantic myth of fall and redemption, this poem argues that a separation of "what I trust" (the objective world) from "love" (subjective desire) leads to a fall into death, a world of pure sense, and age. Reuniting love and trust, however, brings unity of being in the Romantic figure of the child in nature:

Then what I love I trust,
And, careless child again,
Am . . . . . .
Same head-in-air.

One important theme through which Thomas discusses the desire of the self to shape the world it perceives is the relation between words and things, an idea which in Chapter II was found to have roots in the Romantic desire to overcome the ontological distinction between language and reality. In one poem (Poem LVIII) Thomas says that all language used for abstract argument has no vitality until it returns to its origin and appointed end in the natural world:

Any matter move it to conclusion
Begs for a refuge with the bone
So any talk carefree as words can
Down in the sweet-smelling earth
Takes start and end. (N 151)

Thomas, here, seems to be applying the Romantic myth of man's original identity with nature, his fall into separation, and his prospective reunion with nature by imagination, to the history of language. Thus, in the beginning, language and nature were one, all things were metaphors of all things, yet literal too; then, with man, language fell into separation from nature and also became self-divided into ideas and images; but now, through the poet's exercise of imagination, ideas may be "argued" through pure images that in turn seek to take on the "weight" of objects and to shape the outer world. In Poem LVIII, for instance, the poet exhorts us to discuss "any matter" through "poetry" and thus to enliven the natural world: "Brimmed with fire spit it up / Out and the air's as fresh as cider-cheek." Poem LIII discusses the reunion of thought and image. In an elaborately developed metaphor, Thomas imagines a garden of thoughts (plants, animals) cultivated by a gardener (reason?). The poet's task -- to catch or trap or enweb these thoughts in the images of

language so that thought, image, and thing are one -- fascinates Thomas:

> How can the knotted root
> Be trapped in a snare of syllables,
> The tendril or, what's stranger, the high flower
> Caught . . . . . .
> Inside a web of words.

The best way to trap thoughts is not to have them "barred in" (a mixture of abstract and concrete language?) but rather to have them "stuck" by pouring the "honey" of images over them. By calling this method "the only way the world knows," the poet further implies that the incarnation of thought in image corresponds to or is identical with a similar incarnation of spirit or idea in the natural world. This linkage of poetic image with natural object is the subject of Poem XIII ("Conceive these images in air"; N 112-13). Here, the poet imagines the process of poetic creation as a movement from idea to thing in terms of metaphors of the four ancient elements of the world: earth, air, fire, and water. The process begins organically with aerial impregnation and a densening into fire: "Conceive these images in air, / Wrap them in flame, they're mine." Then, the fiery image is placed next to granite (the recalcitrant outer world -- "two dull stones . . . grey") which turns liquid or molten (water) before the poetic images-in-nature solidify as objects like any others, of the same weight as natural phenomena unaltered by the poet's match-like love or red-hot imagination:

> They / the images, cut in stone / harden and take shape again
> As signs I've not brought down
> To any lighter state
> By love-tip or my hand's red heat.

The concept of a multi-level incarnation of ideas-in-images, spirit-in-nature, and finally imagination-in-nature explains Thomas's Romantic identification of the poet with Christ incarnate, the Word-made-flesh. In two poems (XXI, XXIV; N 120, 134) Christ's redeeming love is associated

with the poet. Even more importantly, Poem XXIII (N 121-22), a terribly obscure meditation on religion and poetry, identifies the poet himself with Christ in the Incarnate Word. Musing on the union of language and nature --

> the words are scattered down the canal
> . . . . . .
> . . . phonetic water
> Washes to a wisp

-- the poet imagines himself as the only modern Christ, more appropriately, an outlaw variation of Christ:

> And I am all there is this second,
> Genius for the chosen people
> From the cross . . .
> and thief I am at His side.

Regretting the "split" in man's quest for truth into false reason ("casuistry") and orthodox faith ("ghost or jew"), the poet finds in the idea of Christ a final symbol of the triple incarnation he desires. Christ's death is called a "logogram" or "a sign or character representing a word" (OED). No better word could possible be found, I think, to characterize the Romantic poet's attraction to the Christ figure as a unifier of word and thing, language and nature, as well as the natural and the supernatural and the redeeming power of love. Of course, like other Romantics, Thomas experienced the most inevitable dejection at being unable to realize these goals. Sometimes the experience of deathliness in nature seems to incapacitate words: "Even the words are nothing / While the sun's turned to salt" (N 144). Conversely, should the poet experience a moment of intense natural beauty and human love as in the Poem LVV (Thomas's erratic numbering is followed here), autumnal words may be unable to elevate themselves to a matching plateau: "But this is true, and the high words / Flutter to the ground beside this truth." Finally, the failure of imagination to sustain its pressure

against the world may lead to chaos as in Poem XXVII. There, the poet glumly notes that "the voice will not last" and when it fails it will leave "chaos." Gazing narcissistically at his navel, the poet finds only a temporarily "pleasant insularity," away from the tidal floods of the outer world in which his sailing thoughts voyage and drown, "within the chaos that my dying voice has helped" by the very act of its dying. All he can do is to be "homesick" for the unity of being of Arcadia, as he says, for Glaucus and for Pan. In Poem XX (N 119), employing his code-word for imagination, Thomas exclaims in despair, "Death to the magical when all is done." In spite of such doubts, however, Thomas maintained substantial faith in imaginative creation, as can be seen in three poems which deal directly with this issue.

Poem XL (N 137-38), a bizarre and obscure meditation on imagination and reality, calls for a transformation (not abandonment) of the drab external world of flesh into a world nearer to the heart's desire:

> So we have tired of dying,
> Tired like Lot of the flesh
> But turning it not to salt but to romance,
> And with one gesture
> Drowning the hare-lip gods
> For one unstained to rise up from the depths.

This rising up from within the self of the god who shall redeem is perfectly in keeping with the Romantic myth. This spiritualizing of the external by imagination unites the symbol and the falling blood of the Christ-like poet whose crucifixion saves the world:

> So we are tired of reality;
> My rubber hands upon your flesh
> . . . / are /
> Wise, spiritual hands
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> And all our dropping blood's symbolic.

Another obscure poem, Poem XXXIII (N 133) originally entitled "Little

Problem," seems to be dealing with two attitudes toward art: the imitative theory and the expressivist or Romantic theory. Using for an example the imprints of a runner on a sandy beach, the poet says that "tracing" them for some utilitarian "purpose" or "common good" is "easy," but rather pointless. True poetry, on the other hand, is like a runner who knows why he runs without defining tracings. It comes to the poet as the results of a creative act: the poet must "plumb" his "depths" in an "original" manner to provide the poetic matter that the poetic spirit then fashions. Although good sources of Thomas's poetic ideas, these two poems (XXXII, XL) are failures as poems themselves. Not at all a failure is a third and final poem in this group, Poem LVVV, the 1932 version of the famous poem "The hunchback in the park." Considering at this point, as Thomas did, Poem LVVV as a poem in its own right, it may be argued that although the stanzas are not as finely polished and paralleled in rhythm, image, and phrasing as in the revision, they do contain the central idea that makes both versions striking parables of the Romantic artist creating images of love in solitude. The hunchback lives in the park, in Thomas's own life Cwmdonkin Park which even today remains, for a park, rather wild and untrimmed. Though alone in nature, "a solitary mister," he is not isolated from nature; rather, nature lends support to the hunchback, "propped between trees and water." From the degraded perspective of modern urbanites, the hunchback is a madman, "going daft," while his physical deformity brings on the cruel laughter of children. They call him only "mister" as if to deny him identity, yet with some irony it is they who tease him and run into the oblivion beyond the park, the limit of the hunchback's perception: "Past lake and rockery / On out of sight." All night, when the park is emptied of all but the Yeatsian "three veteran swans," the hunchback assumes his

true identity as Romantic poet by creating in the mind a figure of ideal feminine beauty which he then transposes from the inner self to the outer landscape: he makes

> A figure without fault
> And sees it on the gravel paths
> Or walking on the water.

The feminine ideal brings unity of being and may be a nature-spirit for she is "frozen all the winter" and appears only in the summer. That the hunchback is a poet exercising imagination we know directly: "It is a poem and it is a woman figure." She calls to him from the water of the lake and, unlike his angry response to the taunting children, he now smiles at the woman who has left his imagination to live in the park.

Before proceeding from these poems in which the self seeks to govern or shape the world to those poems in which the self and world are of equal weight in balance, tension, or coalescence, one more group of poems in which the self could of greater import than the world must be examined. These are the poems that reject the desirability of aesthetic withdrawal into the world of the mind, a narcissistic denial of any relation of the self to the world. Previously, Poem XI was analyzed as a rejection of the mechanical nightingale (the aesthetic art object) whose song could not affect the sun in favor of the poet's Orphic guitar that governed the sun's color and its course. In more somber mood, Poem XLIII (N 139-40) broods over Thomas's perennial theme, the unending cycles of birth and death in nature. Still, though nature is filled with death, man is not eager to leave it. Those who seek to withdraw from nature into the self are compared to a greenhouse full of exotic growths:

> But we, shut in the houses of the brain,
> Brood on each hothouse plant
> Spewing its sapless leaves around.

In a rather grimly witty poem whose unspoken thesis seems to be the old cliche "the proof is in the pudding," the poet says that the worth of a philosopher's views must be tested by his reaction to being cooked in an oven, a wise man's wisdom by his ability to extricate himself from the fools who die under a car's wheels. The third example, that of the poet, is phrased as follows: "Thus we defy all poetry / By staying in this aviary" (N 145). Like the hothouse, the aviary is an artificial environment meant for the cultivation of exotic species. To live in the exoticism of the self's sensibility is to defy or deny the nature of poetry which is to bring relationship at least, and maybe love. This aviary metaphor also informs more complex poems on aesthetic withdrawal, such as Poem IX, the 1931 version of "The spire cranes" (revised 1938). Here the poet is a stone spire containing a statue that serves as an aviary and a bell with chimes. The purely private poem of the aesthetic poet is a nightingale which he keeps imprisoned in its "nest / Of stone" and does not allow to fly out of the privacy of the self into the world:

> He does not let the nightingales
> Blunt their tawny necks on rock
> Or pierce the sky with diving.

Put slightly differently, neither stone notes from the bell or stone birds could exist in the outer world for they are "dead," inorganic: "The spire's hook drops birds and notes, / Each featherless and stony hearted." Better are chimes that unite the poet with other humans (a swimmer whose mouth is filled with the bells) or the "upward birds" that "breast the vertical" in an ascending quest for unity with nature and the divine. Those birds that "like prodigals" return home to the stony aviary are to be shunned as narcissistic creations linking the poet, ultimately, only to himself. Incidentally, in the 1938 version, Thomas echoes Keats's "Bright Star" sonnet in his phrase that stands

for the linkage of the poet's order-bringing words ("chimes") with a sacramental nature -- "that priest, water" (P 15).

In addition to these poems about the rather clear-cut success or failure of imagination in governing its relation to the external world, other poems see the self-world relationships as more ambivalent -- a case of the balancing of tense opposites or the partial or entire coalescence of equal powers, a coalescence not always desired by the self. The burden of self-consciousness may end in death or in one of the Romantic images of unity of being -- the dancer or the child. In a fascinating little poem, Poem III ("Sometimes the sky's too bright"; N 104-05), the poet seems to imagine the external world as a painting or piece of sculpture of which he is critical but which his own projected poetic images fail to alter:

> Sometimes the sky's too bright,
> Or has too many clouds or birds,
> And far away's too sharp a sun.

yet he asks

> Why is my hand too blunt
> To cut in front of me
> My horrid images for me.

One such horrid image is projected female figure (a femme fatale):

> The creature with the angel's face
> Who tells me hurt
> . . . . . .
> I tear her breast
> And see the blood in mine.

Painting further images on the sky, the poet feels the "pain" of external stimuli but he does not "ache" in the inner world from which the floundering images arise. In other poems, the union of self and world is sexual and poetic, a polysemous metaphor containing the multiple actions of the poem. Poem XVII (N 116) is a longing "to be encompassed by the brilliant earth" yet such encompassing is also a description of sexual

intercourse:

> . . . her vegetation's lapping mouths
> Must feel like such encroachment
> As edges off your nerves to mine
> The hemming contact.

As in so many poems to follow, here Thomas employs images that seem equally descriptive of external nature or of sex -- "the yellow nut . . . the wax's tower." The final lines, too, describe the breaking of the virgin knot and/or the foray of the self into nature:

> A world of webs
> I touch and break,
> I touch and break.

A better poem still, Poem XXI ("High on a hill"; N 120) attempts (but, in consistency, fails) to create a polysemous metaphor for the self's relation to nature, sex, and poetic creation. The poet seems to be riding a hill like a bucking bronco, yet this hill is surprisingly female -- "straddle her wrinkled knees" -- as the adder, snake, and shell-bursting bird are creatures of nature but also the penis. The poetic dimension of the imagery is made explicit in the exclamation "Christ, let me write from the heart," an instance of Romantic expressivism, which makes "the carnal stem" not only flower stalk and penis but also the poet's phallic ink pen which "deflowers" the "virgin" paper -- a metaphor which as was shown in Chapter II is frequent in Thomas's letters. As he writes from the "heart," the "blood's ebb" of line 13 is of the detumescent penis and the receding moment of poetic inspiration. A less sophisticated poem on the relation of self to world by poetic creation or love is "Here is a beauty . . ." (N 156-57), derivative of a poem like Keats's Nightingale Ode. A bird sings to its dead mate who seems resurrected by the song. Standing apart, the poet cannot imitate the bird so as to link himself to his own estranged lover:

> Here is a beauty on a bough I can't translate
> Through words or love,
> So high it is.

Thomas's poetry, then, is often perfectly opposite to itself in describing the self's relation to nature as either that of ecstatic union, imaginative transformation, or impotent despair. In a final grouping of poems from the 1930-32 Notebook on the problem of self and world, Thomas's agony over the burden of self-consciousness gives way to a despairing longing for death or the search for Romantic images of unity of being: the dancer and the child.

The 1930-32 Notebook marks the emergence of Thomas's characteristic brooding over the endless cycles of creation and decay in the universe, an imprisoning cycle from which he seeks escape his whole life long by trying to invoke the power of poetic creation to reverse or end the cycle. Poem XXV (N 125-26) is an obscure meditation on two impulses toward poetic creation -- death and love -- both of which relieve the poet of his burden of self-consciousness. Even as the poet writes, death's promise comes nearer in the passing of time:

> I have a friend in death,
> Daywise, the grave's inertia
> Mending my head that needs its hour's pain
> Under the arc lamp,
> Or between my skull and me.

Likewise, love relieves the burden of intense conscious thought and even obliterates the poetry itself as an illusion:

> And love . . .
> . . . . . .
> Who is my friend in truth
> . . . heaps his shadows on my aching mind
> . . . . . .
> . . . and with his blood
> Drowns all the actions I have lied.

Several simpler poems also present death as a good insofar as it is an end to self-consciousness and is at least some kind of union between man

and nature. Poem XXIX (N 136-37) is a haunting metaphorical interplay of these avenues out of self-consciousness:

> Love is sleep, and ends and sleeps;
> All can be composed thus therein,
> Love, sleep, and death the only plan.

Poem XLIII, examined earlier, rejects both aesthetic withdrawal and the deathliness of external nature in a final exclamation: "Death take us all and close the tired lids." Poem XLVI (N 142), an epitaph for the poet's grave, posits death as the ultimate end of all: "I am man's reply to every question, / His aim and destination." The escape from self-consciousness into death is, however, not always necessary or available. In Poem LIV (N 147-48), an Eliotic city lyric, "children of darkness" or the "ordinary man" in the city rejects the visions of poetic genius for the boring rounds of a diurnal course: "We are ordinary men, / Bred in the dark behind the skirting board." Conversely, self-consciousness for the un-ordinary may be an eternal Tithonic hell. Poem LVVII (N 153) is a berating of those who live a life of material greed and lust, "man . . . a mole within his fleshly prison," and the growth out of childhood unity into manhood is a process of estrangement:

> And what fits father'll fit the world
> . . . . . .
> Though man, their logic, is both daft and drunk,
> And cannot close his riddled eaten lids.

The idea of the eternal hell of adulthood as a life of lidless eyes also informs Poem XLVIX (N 144-45) where narcissistic isolation is a living hell:

> never to reach the oblivious dark
> And not to know
> Any man's troubles nor your own
> . . . . . .
> Never is nightmare.

Even at night and in sleep the oppressive "light" of consciousness intrudes

to stain the "broken brain," nor does even suicide by bashing the brain against a wall seem to offer an end to the agonies of consciousness. In rare moments, however, the poet does seem to recover a sense of unity of being in the reconciling images of the dancer and the child. Poem IV (N 105-06) describes a beautiful sea world across which waves move like dancers:

> These waves are dancers on an emerald floor;
> Upon a thousand, pointed trees
> They step the sea,
> Lightly, as in a pantomime.

Here the poet seems to imagine unity of being in nature after which words are superfluous -- thus, a "pantomime," and fish that move "soundlessly" -- and wherein numinous powers reside -- "these thousand pebbles are a thousand eyes." More directly, Poem VIII, a Yeatsian imitation on the union of Leda and the swan, sees the union of the human female and the god-animal (nature/supernatural) as a dance of love:

> the morning, too, is time for love,
> When Leda on a toe of down,
> Dances invisibly.

Similarly, Poem XXII (N 120-21) condemns the structures of orthodox religion (Christian, Jewish) that tell the poet that sexual desires (here, a dance-hall girl) are wrong. Although not as central here as in the later poems like "Fern Hill," the figure of the child does emerge occasionally as a symbol of lost innocence and of a unified sensibility. In Poem VII ("Rain cuts the place we tread"; N 107-08) the poet sees himself in a public park's fountain as the "fountain boy" who possesses the power of shaping nature:

> no fountain boy but me
> To balance on my palms
> The water from a street of clouds.

Poem XXIII, analyzed earlier, contains a passage in which an Edenic state of being is associated with Calvary before the crucifixion of Christ and

childhood:

> I'll put away the clock
> . . . . . .
> Etching the mossy earth we lived in
> When there was grass on Calvary,
> And the children's pond
> Fit for my sails or for my wings.

Even more directly, in Poem XLIV (N 140-41), in four Blakean lines (but with a pun) Thomas associates truth with the child:

> Out of the infant's mouth
> Learn what is infant truth,
> See what the boy writes on the wall,
> The facts of being in a doggerel.

A final poem from this notebook in which the child figure appears, Poem LVVIV (N 154), introduces the next group of poems for consideration: those that deal with the problem of the relationship of self and world with the greater emphasis on "world" -- nature or the landscape that confronts, repels, or includes the poet.

Poem LVVIV ("Being but men, we walked into the trees"; N 154) is a real jewel among the early poems and has only just recently been printed for the first time in a popular selection of Thomas's best poems (SP 26). Although it has yet to attract a critical commentary, this poem, with Poem XXI ("High on a hill"), is an important expression of Thomas's Romantic ideas and his love of the polysemous metaphor as a way to unite natural, sexual, and poetic action. In "Being but men" Thomas dramatizes the Romantic myth. A forest whose trees are full of rooks is entered first by adults and secondly, hypothetically, by children. The difference between the two responses -- that of adults and that of the children -- to the scene defines unity of being as the spirit of the child whose imagination is activated wordlessly by wonder at the divinity of the universe. The opening stanza of the poem presents the mind of the adult estranged from nature:

Being but men, we walked into the trees
Afraid, letting our syllables be soft
For fear of waking the rooks,
For fear of coming
Noiselessly into a world of wings and cries.

As so often in Thomas, birds in their song are symbols of a linking between art and nature or spirit and nature. Here, the "men" fear the sleeping rooks and in their exercise of language ("our syllables") they are both too timid to be Orphic fashioners (to wake the rooks and thus to link themselves to nature's own consciousness) or to immerse themselves in nature (to enter the woods without using human language and thus to be governed by the "wings and cries" of the rooks). Both egotistical sublime and negative capability, in other words, are refused. There is also one of Thomas's multivalent puns, for in saying that the men "walked into" the trees Thomas leaves us with three possibilities: (1) the men entered the woods, (2) the men bumped into the trees, or (3) they each walked inside of a tree, completely transformed from their human selves. This presentation of a range of possibilities is a way of judging the men who seem to choose the first alternative, although semantically all three possibilities remain open as we read the poem's opening line. Stanza two contrasts the experience of the men to that of children. If the men were children, Thomas says, we would climb the trees without waking the rooks and "thrust out our hands above the branches / To wonder at the unfailing stars." Following Frye, we see that the "men" live in the fallen world of self-consciousness; they desire redemption by a return to something like the sensibility of the child. The men live in lower nature but the children, climbing the world-tree toward the eternal stars that evoke wonder, are moving into upper nature, nature in its unfallen visionary form. The result of this movement from manhood to new childhood, and secondarily, from a

rationalistic to an imaginative relation with nature, is redemptive:

> Out of confusion, as the way is,
> And the wonder that man knows,
> Out of the chaos would come bliss.

As men, the poet says, we can perceive these children's actions as an expression of the love that ought to link us to living nature:

> That, then, is loveliness we said,
> Children in wonder watching the stars,
> Is the aim and end.

But being men, he concludes, "we walked into the trees." Though rather brief, this poem is a variation on the greater Romantic lyric. The poet confronts a landscape (unlocalized but probably Cwmdonkin Park or Fernhill), finds that unity with it is hard to achieve, recalls a former time when such unity was possible, comes to an important conclusion about the true relationship of self and world, and comes back in the end to the original state of mind with which the poem began but stronger now in hope that a synthesis of past unity and present disunity may have been fostered by the act of creating the poem itself, evoked by the landscape.

Two additional poems on the search for unity with the natural world involve elements of the Romantic quest poem. Poem VII ("Rain cuts the place we tread"; N 107-08), is set in the particularized landscape of Dwmdonkin Park. Thomas recalls that as a child he made-believe that the shell and gravel paths of the park were rivers on whose rocky waves he sailed a toy boat. In a moment of ecstatic insight, both boy and boat seem luminous portions of the garden whose graveled paths match the starred heavens:

> The unrolled waves
> So starred with gravel
> The living vessels of the garden
> Drifting in easy time.

Another powerful serious pun, "vessel" may indicate a ship, a conduit of blood, a living organism within the garden, or the organic imagination of the make-believing boy and the recollecting poet that contains the garden within itself. As rain begins to fall, the boy sees "a legendary horse" in the sky followed by a rainbow. Probably Pegasus, the horse is a traditional symbol for poetic power, its rainbow a secular displacement of the divine symbol of God's covenant with Noah -- here, the young boy sailing his vessel on gravel paths as the rain begins. The young voyager's ship threatens to come to stop in a wasteland of withered and artificial plants:

> We try to steer;
> The stream's fantastically hard
> . . . . . .
> A sedge of broken stalks and shells
> . . . a drain of iron plants.

But the covenant of imagination, symbolized by the horse and exercised by the boy in imagining the gravel path a river, is fulfilled in a moment of loving union with the rain (green) and sky (blue):

> . . . this minute,
> The emerald kiss,
> And breath on breath of indigo.

A second poem that contains elements of the Romantic quest is "How the birds have become talkative" (N 159-60). The scene is a landscape by the ocean. On a sunny day with the sky full of birds, a quester-knight appears. What he quests for is some sign of the divine in nature, but although the birds are a bridge between the knight and nature, an estranging rationality (symbolized by the cold metal of his armor) prevents the knight from apprehending the message of the birds. The knight recognizes how "talkative" the birds have become as they shape their world with "criss-cross" movements in the sky or with "razor" foot that cuts the water on wings "bruising" the waves. Encased in the double

metals of armor and reason, the knight does not see the birds as symbols of imagination opening up passages in the fallen world to nature's original form: the birds are

> crouching and talking,
> But for his cold intelligence
> Breaking the sky with song.

They break open the sky and climb toward Eden on a Platonic ladder of notes (the "scales" of music) that come from their throats. But the knight remains deaf, the birds' sunlit message of divine presence in nature reflected from the very metal helmet (reason) that imprisons the knight's head:

> He heard no syllables,
> And so missed what divinity
> Their messages could hold for man unmaidened
> And with helmet multiplying sun on sun
> Till all the metal was parhelion.

A brilliant choice, "parhelion" is "a spot on a solar halo at which the light is intensified; . . . a mock sun" (OED). A parhelic circle, furthermore, is a luminous circle below the sun parallel to the horizon. Thus, in Thomas's poem, the "cold intelligence" of the knight's helmet is a mock sun, defined by the revelation of divinity in nature by the birds whose language ought to link them to the human quester. Wearing a halo as if he were a saint of nature yet oblivious to nature's whimsy here at his expense, the knight remains bewildered and no doubt searches elsewhere for the answers that only the cold metal of his own mental armor blinds him from seeing. For a seventeen year old poet, this is a superb poem, I think, and a workmanlike poem for anyone.

Too numerous to comment on fully, many other poems in the 1930-32 Notebook deal with nature as an object of union, an antagonist, or an object for imaginative redemption. Poem IX ("The spire cranes") rejects the stone nightingales of aestheticism for the "upward birds" of an

organic imagination working from lower to upper nature. Poems IV and V (N 105-06), the only notebook poems printed by Thomas in SGSM, are Imagist evocations of a luminous ocean and sky. Poem XXVII rejects both aesthetic withdrawal and a nature of death for the Arcadia of Glaucus and Pan. In Poem XXIX ("Since, on a quiet night" N 129) where we find the most derivative but also most evocative Yeatsian diction in all of Thomas, the poet in a darker mood imagines two characters, first a woman and then a child, standing by the sea singing of their separate lonelinesses. In conscious reply, the world answers "'Oblivion is as loverless / Oblivion is as loverless"; thus, every human state seems to reflect a corresponding state in nature. In another eery poem, Poem LV (N 148-49), oblivion gets her lover in a strange poem of necrophilia. The collective voices of oblivion imagine the interment of the dead poet and how they, as caressing forms of decay shall erotically possess the body: "He'll lie down, and our breath / Will chill the roundness of his cheeks" till the dead self and death itself are one. A strange poem in the style of Old Testament verse, Poem XLI (N 138-39) scorns man for seeking rational answers as to why nature is as it is: "Why is the blood red and the grass green / Shant be answered till the voice is still." This "voice" is reason, "its moan / Of man and his meaning" which is likened to the cries of Job and the Israelites when exiled from God: "the voice from the wilderness / That cryeth for reason." Man's "meaning" is only "the blood's that connects him with nature; man-as-rationalist is separated from the answers of the blood by his intellect that formulates rationalistic questions about an existence which is in essence irrational. If reason is absurd, so is human society as Poem XIX (N 117-18) argues. Here, "the natural day and night" ease the poet's melancholy and foster his

impulsive poetry. Sun and stones "crack" all evidence of rational order -- trim hedgerow, glasshouse, laboratory -- while the decayed representations of human society uphold its falsehoods:

> the chic anatomy
> Of ladies' needles worn to breaking point
> Sewing a lie to a credulity.

The poet's "merry words" are informed by the black beetle who brings "incorruptible knowledge" of nature's corruption. Social values created by man cannot overcome the poet's perception of decay at the heart of nature: ultimate value, grim though it may be, seems to lie in nature, not in human constructs. As we have also seen, however, nature in its best aspects may also inspire poetry and love. In Poem LVVV the hunchback poet creates his ideal woman in Cwmdonkin Park while Poem XXI describes the processes of creation in nature, human lovemaking, and poetry, as one. Similarly, Poem VIII, on Leda and the swan, unites natural-supernatural lovemaking, nature, and art. The woods by Leda's stream have "phrases" on their boughs, the birds "notes of ivory," while the swan makes "strings" (as in stringed instruments) of water and the poet plays a harp. Thus, the division between art and nature is broken down. Poem LVV (N 152) even claims that no person can know what human love is until he or she knows "the loveliness of May, / The blossoms and the throated trees." Poems XI, XIII, and XXXIII, all discussed earlier as examples of the imagination's power to shape nature, define the poet's central task as a lifelong engagement with the outer world which, though both lovely and deathly, is inextricably bound up in man's own fate. Finally, it may be noted that in the 1930-32 Notebook we find the first of several poems set in a particularized landscape, Romantic "place" poems, before which the poet exercises his memory to recall a former time when self and world were one. Here,

Poems VII, XXI, and LVVV are set specifically in Cwmdonkin Park that stands across the street from Thomas's boyhood home.

The 1930-32 Notebook contains a wide variety of attitudes toward love. As in the earlier notebook, here too the central question is whether or not love can function as a redemptive agent in the uniting of self and world or self and another single individual. Sometimes sexual love is seen as a way out of the tyranny of reason as well as a passageway to knowledge of the ultimate nature of the universe. Poem XXVI (N 126-27) attacks the rationalist who does not exalt sex because his "head's vacuity can breed no truth / Out of its sensible tedium." Such wise men "spend their love . . . / Within the places of the mind" but the poet knows that through the flesh one crosses "a bridge of being" where the rationalist cannot go but which links the lovers to the cosmos. Poem XVIII (N 116-17) similarly rejects "the logician" for the "fairy" and for "unreason in a time of magic" when it comes to loving. Only the skeletons of the dead are "epicene" or sexless. Beyond the merely sexual, love can link man with the divine. Poem XX (N 119), a lover's pilgrim's progress ("although through my bewildered way"), gives to love the power to save the poet from death:

> You'll bring the place to me
> Where all is well,
> Noble among a crowd of lights.

Poem VII describes the ecstatic lovemaking of Leda and the swan. Poem XXXIV (N 134) praises love over the wisdom that can destroy it: "Wisdom is folly, love is not, / Sense can but maim it, wisdom mar it." True wisdom is found in stones and trees while lovers who are "silly" remain "Christ's good brother" because love is divine. Love is also a power of the self, assertive against the impinging outer world of rational perception. Thus, in Poem XLVIII (N 143) the poet posits "love" against

"trust": to assert by loving is to become a child again who shapes his own world, "head-in-air." Love may even be identified with life itself:

> They are the only dead who did not love
> . . . . . .
> They are the only living who did love.
> (N 130)

Such love is "godliness" and "divinity" and unites the self and the other:

> And there's the living who did love
> Around our little selves
> Touching our separate love with bandinage.
> (N 131)

Death itself is not an end to loving, as three poems on necrophilia show. Poem XXIX imagines a loverless woman being answered by a loverless "oblivion" with whom she may unite. In Poem XXXVI (N 135) a woman's grave is called her second womb which God will fructify with seeds of death, while Poem LV (N 148-49) is the story of these seeds of death as they erotically possess the body of the dead. In fact, love is really only the first phase of three which gradually resolve the problem of self-consciousness: "love, sleep, and death, the only plan" (N 137).

Thomas does not, however, always find love an effective agent in combatting rationalism or overcoming the isolation of the self. Musing on Solomon's love for Sheba and its aftermath, the poet finds that though Sheba's love "bridges time" in the moment of ecstasy, that love and its words cannot sustain their relationship-bringing power: love

> is and is not,
> The words that bridge content and time,
> / Love / is and is not. (N 135-36)

This linking of love and words implies that the poet's power to foster love by language is crucial. Poem I (N 103) laments the poet's tendency to divinize or idealize his women:

> This love -- perhaps I over-rate it,
> And make my god an any woman
> . . . . . .
> . . . a love . . .
> True and too beautiful.

Seeking even greater unity of being, the poet may fashion a woman into an hermaphrodite by the power of "magic" or imagination: "You be my hermaphrodite in logic, / My avocado temptress out of magic." The poet says he will "force" the woman to be transformed and thus to commit "cerebral sodomy" with an hermaphroditic figure of the mind -- possibly Thomas's one original contribution to poetic depictions of innovative sexual practices. A more significant poem on love and poetics is Poem LVI (N 149-50). The poet recounts the sufferings of the lover who seeks an embodiment of the ideal yet finds only disillusionment and physical repulsion:

> What lunatic's whored after shadow,
> Followed the full-voiced stream
> To stop and taste it vinegar?

Thus failing, he exercises poetic imagination to create his ideal:

> Then has the written word
> To give the love he haggard lacked from her,
> The lifted note and the carven stone.

Yet like Keats before the urn, the poet here too seems to reject the purely aesthetic and sterile love of the mind. The woman is "celluloid." And the "written heat" of the poem on the page, like Keats's "cold pastoral," is "turned, oh stone, cold stone!" for "loving means nothing, housed in the bosom." Although such a love purely of words must fail, human love also fails if the words do that foster the love. Thus, in Poem LVVVI (N 156), a substantially complete version of "Out of the sighs," describes the forlorn poet as a soldier of love who bled words for blood in his losing battle for the woman:

leaving woman waiting . . .
For her warrior stained with spilt words
That spill such acrid blood.

The real woman recedes again into the ideal woman on the poem's page. Love may fail to link the self and the other not only as a function of the poet's imagination but in all the ordinary ways. The poet may project his own desires onto the lover ("I tear her breast, / And see the blood is mine"; N 105), or, in an early version of "Then was my neophyte" (N 111), the newborn child ("the neophyte") is trapped in the world of death and time as a result of the self-deluding act of love: "Where love is there's a crust of joy / To hide what drags it belly from the egg." The act of love is an act of death, a grim reversal of its promise. Even the sexual act itself may be an imprisoning -- "encroachment" and the "hemming contact" of blood and nerves (N 116). Other failings of love are age (N 119), inconstancy (N 139), its innate inability as shown in the fine lyric poem LII (N 146), and disgust with sex as ultimately boring (N 122f.), or, in an oddly puritanical poem, a tool of the devil who rules the fallen world (N 158-59). Though love may indeed be a "descension of the drawers," it still remains, as shown earlier, a relationship-bringing power, an agent of imagination, that can be made to function at times. Love can cause two selves to be perfectly interchangeable:

Live in my living
. . . . . .
Here is your breast,
And here is mine;
This is your foot,
And this is mine. (N 106)

A beautiful love lyric is Poem LVVI, "Do thou heed me, cinnamon-smelling," where sexual union is completely satisfying. The hunchback is satisfied with his woman figure that he creates and sends forth to dance in the park,

while the organic poetic process itself is seen as an act of love (Poems LVVV, XXI). After the highly self-conscious act of poetic composition, the poet's reward of a feeling of unity of being comes in the form of love that engulfs the "lies" of the fictitious poems:

> And love . . .
> . . . . . .
> Who is my friend in truth
> . . . heaps his shadows on my aching mind
> . . . . . .
> Drowns all the actions I have lied. (N 126)

The poem from which this passage comes, Poem XXV, is in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode and introduces a final, brief citation of those poems that exhibit Romantic poetic devices, attributes, or forms.

Some of these traits have already been adequately discussed above. These include the Romantic figures of the dancer, the child, the self as its own redeemer, an exile, and the desire to remove the barrier between words and things. To these may be added the following traits. Several poems contain the Romantic concept of the epiphanic moment of insight or poetic creation. Poem II sees the moment of poetic creation as a union between internal and external as linked by the poetic symbol and nature as symbol: "To-day, this hour I breathe / In symbols . . . of tongue and air" (N 103). Poem XXV also describes poetic creation as a moment of insight, the "hour's pain" of the head: "The moment is so small, / The beam that makes the highing urge" (N 125). Should imagination fail, man will degenerate into an ape-man whose low-hanging breast will symbolize a failed moment of transformation: "symbol / Of the moment and the dead hours" (N 152). Several poems also attempt to construct a polysemous metaphor whose vehicle may carry two tenors, one internal and the other external. Poem IX blends the spire as external artifact and as metaphor for the body of the creating poet so that art

and nature seem one continuous process. Poem XXI, discussed above, blends the processes of natural, sexual, and poetic creation into one seamless event. Poem LI (N 145-46) presents the evolution of seed and flower and the rising and falling of the penis as one, though the emphasis falls more on the flower. And Poem LVVVI tries to blend Christ's tasting of the vinegar on the cross, sexual satisfaction, and poetic creation. Romantic ideas about the nature and source of the poetic impulse also appear. The poet is an expressivist ("Christ, let me write from the heart"; N 120), and he views the process of poetic creation as organic: a bird (Poem IX), a flower (Poem LIII), or, directly, as creative and original (Poem XXXIII). A few inchoate Romantic poetic forms appear. Poem VII and the unnumbered poem "How the birds" are scenes from Romantic quest poems whose goal is unity with nature. Also, Poem LVVIV ("Being but men") is a miniature example of a greater Romantic lyric. Lastly, Poem XXV is in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode in its bemoaning of the failure of imagination to sustain itself against the fallen world.

In conclusion, the 1930-32 Notebook marks an important phase in Thomas's poetic development. Fewer of its poems are directly or obviously derivative of earlier Romantic or Modernist poets. Thomas's Romantic concerns remain dominant, but this notebook marks the beginning of the poet's imagination of disaster in the cycles of birth, sex, and death in the natural world. In order to redeem that world and to save the self, the poet is forced, either consciously or (more likely) unconsciously, to develop a strongly stressed, deeply and obscurely imagistic style, and a "poetic self" who, as creator of the images in his own poems, can link by the single "language" of poetry and nature the image-making poet and the world from which the images are derived. Thus, the

1930-32 Notebook signals the beginning in Thomas of the familiar Modernist variation on the earlier, more positive nineteenth-century Romantic stance: a more profound and disheartened apprehension of the Romantic "problem" of how to link self and world yet simultaneously a greater fear that the Romantic "positives" of nature, love, and imagination may be unequal to the task set before them. The February 1933 Notebook is an intensification of this struggle.

Poems from the lost 1932-33 Notebook and the February 1933 Notebook. In his appendix to the Notebooks (N 342-49), Maud prints nine poems from the 1932-33 period which survive in typescript. Probably from a now lost 1932-33 notebook, these poems will be examined together with the poems in the February 1933 Notebook. In his introduction to the Notebooks, Maud designates this notebook as the beginning of Thomas's famous "inlooking" poems, phantasmagoric evocations of "process" in the body and the natural world to which it is linked. Actually, as I have tried to show, Thomas's Romantic concern with the self, world, and whatever links or might link the two (sex, imagination, death) begins with his earliest poetry, the pre-Notebook juvenilia, and continues through the 1930 and 1930-32 Notebooks. What really changes in each of Thomas's successive notebooks or, later, published volumes are Thomas's increasing mastery of poetic technique -- complicated aural patterns, stanza forms, and striking though obscure imagery -- and periodic risings and fallings off of his faith in the ability of imagination to heal the gap between subject and object. The most important fact to be learned from a reading of the February Notebook is that this notebook contains nine substantial versions of poems that appeared in Twenty-Five Poems (1936) and The Map of Love (1939), volumes whose obsession with decay, death, and the self-consciousness of the isolated

artist is put forward by Moynihan and Hardesty (see n. 7 above) as evidence that the poetry of "creation" and of an assertive Romantic self in 18 Poems was followed by a period of "fall" poems. Actually, those poems in the juvenilia and the 1930 and 1930-32 Notebooks that celebrate the process of imaginative creation in its power over the external world represent Thomas's first contributions to the "creation" phase of the Romantic myth; and even then, plenty of poems of "fall" also exist. Thus, the poems of the August Notebook, from which thirteen of the eighteen poems in 18 Poems are derived, represent an attempt to react against a profound consciousness of estrangement by imitating God's original creation in the exercising of the poet's own imagination in writing poems about various forms of creation.

As in the juvenilia and the two previous notebooks, so too in the 1932-33 typescript poems and the February 1933 Notebook, the problem of the relationship of self and world is dominant. Although there are poems of despair and also of joy concerning the solubility of the problem, the poems of despair weigh more heavily than the earlier poems. Thomas becomes ever more aware that the disunity between man and nature is a problem that must be overcome by the poet as his own redeemer and fashioner of his own imaginative faith. The Romantic "displacement" of the values of orthodox religion into a secular context is accompanied by several poems that are clear and explicit embodiments of the Romantic myth. Also, there are some (rather unsuccessful) attempts to write in the Romantic genre of the spiritual autobiography of the poet-as-poet, a genre to which Thomas did make one important contribution, the Altar-wise by Owl-light sonnet sequence, an examination of which will close this chapter.

The poems which deal with the self's attempts to establish its

primacy over that of the external world show a marked increase both in despair over establishing that primacy and a corresponding intensification of the self's claims for its own powers and intentions of resistance against any relationship with nature not governed by the self's own terms and desires. One of the most striking of the more despairing of these poems is "Especially when the November wind," a 1932-33 version of the well known "Especially when the October wind" from which it differs radically. One month further into the cold than its distinguished later version, the 1932-33 poem has as its theme the paradox that the more intensely the poet writes in order to find a way to link himself to the outer world the more self-conscious he becomes of his isolation, an isolation seemingly made worse by the very self-consciousness of the act of poetic creation itself. An evil version of the Romantic metaphor of the correspondent breeze, the "November wind / With frosty fingers, punishes my hair" as the poet's fingers respond to the creative breezes of inspiration. The poet seems to face two unpleasant choices: to expend his animal youth in a nature that is killing him even as he enjoys the release from the burdens of human thought or else to compose an aesthetic poetry that cannot create unity of being for the fully human poet in a fully natural world. Thus, the "raw / Spirits of words" and "arid syllables" oppress the brain and heart. Being caught in "the chain of words" and "shut in a tower of words," the poet envies animals, children, or unselfconscious men who in their primitive "language" or in silence find the unity with nature that escapes the poet. The "cries" of a seabird, the "cough" of sheep, silent men who "walk like trees" with which they are one, and children "speaking on fingers and thumbs" all lead the poet to exclaim: "How good it is to feel November air / And be no words' prisoner." But why then does the poet persist in his task?

He does so because poetic creation is his way of seeking to overcome death, time, and external threats by reason to the power of love:

> Wagging a wild tongue at the clock
> Deploring death and raising roofs
> Of words to keep unharmed
> . . . . . .
> The bits and pieces of dissected loves.

These "dissected loves" are the subject of Poem Two in the February Notebook. There, each of the poet's forays into the world on a mission of love results in the death of that particular questing self. All attempts to reach the "other" are deadly: "It is death to sink again / My breath and blood into another." To do so creates a "cracked heart" thus malformed by the "cracked sky" of the outer world that governs it. All the dead selves from the many forays out of the lover are "my . . . skeletons" that lie in a heap. This sense of the almost inevitable defeat of the self moving into the world leads the poet to regret his ever having become conscious of the "fall" that split man and man, and the sense of defeat causes him to cry out for a "mask" to shield the self from its foe the world. Poem Five (N 167) claims that there is no cure for the fall into self-consciousness, not even the cure of poetry or love. The poet's words become "septic" and love turns to "thinking." Echoing possibly the first line of Wordsworth's Intimations Ode, the poet asks whether art could ever heal self-consciousness:

> Was there a time when any fiddles,
> Meaning in unison, could stop day troubles,
> Start some new loving?

The poet is "killed by words" that tell him of his isolation, and the only "cure" for self-consciousness is its prevention:

> What's never known is safest in his life
> . . . . . .
> . . . And the blind man sees best.

But if one does "know" estrangement from a hostile world, what should be

one's strategy to survive. Poem Eighteen (N 180-81), a longer version of "O make me a mask" printed in The Map of Love, suggests that the poet must resort to guile to survive. The poet calls for a mask that is "a countenance hewed out of river ice" that "with no glance compromises" and thus keeps the integrity of the self. Contact with the external only betrays the "inner love"; the poet's true function is that of the snake charmer whose music controls the snake, symbol of the deathliness in nature: "Its eyes see nothing, are stone-cold and dead."

A second group of poems concedes that the self and nature may be united -- but only in death. This knowledge, in turn, inspires poems that search the poet's own or a human being's odyssey through the flesh for the right relation to nature. Poem Twenty-Two (N 185-86) identifies the poet's aspiration for unity with nature in the twin globes of dew and sun as impossible prior to death. There are men, he says, who seek to govern nature by imposing their own order upon her. They seek to hang stars on cherry trees, to "dam and turn the lunar lake / Behind the railings of a private park" and to graft moon plants onto their domestic arbutus. Such desire is a madness the poet argues:

> But, though they reach, they cannot touch and take
> Sun, moon, and stars, to be their own.
> These they cannot compass in their thoughts.

In death, however, nature will compass them, not in oblivion, but in a pantheistic Oneness:

> These wants remain unsatisfied till death.
> Then, when his soul is naked, is he one
> With the man in the wind and the west moon,
> And the harmonious thunder of the sun.

Poem Thirty-Nine (N 207-08) foreshadows Thomas's slightly later development of an all-inclusive Romantic self in its claim that the poet (as the instrument of the reconciling imagination) is the creator of unity

out of disunity. He says, "in me ten paradoxes make one truth" and describes the process of unification by the organic analogy of ten roots that entwine to form a single root. Equivalent to the imagination of the poet, this root will not produce a bush (a foray into the external of the subterranean self), however, until the final paradox of life and death is resolved. Though describing himself as something like Blake's Albion ("I am the one man living amid ghosts"), as either an androgyne or else a eunuch, and as the natural-supernatural, life-and-death unifying Christ ("I am the chosen / One"), the poet cannot sustain this all-encompassing Romantic self to the end.

If unity between man and nature is only found in death, then life may become a search for intimations of what sort of unity that death will bring. Three early quest poems, though not developed entirely, prefigure the Altarwise sonnets which are probably the most complete expression of Thomas's Romanticism in the 1929-36 period. Here, Poem Twenty-Four (N 188-91) is an attempt to embody the Romantic myth of the self's fall into disunity and the subsequent quest for reunification. The first five stanzas depict the mind burdened with self-consciousness and estranged both from the world and its own subconscious regions. The hero's mind is full of mechanistic "wheels" and "engines" which grind up the poet's potentially reconciling images and deposit them in the detritus of the "half dead vanities" of the lower mind. Going mad and cursing God, the hero sees an objective correlative to his own imagination run mad: "The moon leers down the valley like a fool." Deranged, the slightest external noice disrupts the self's equilibrium -- "and there was thunder in the opening of a rose" -- while women become Medusa-like femme fatales:

> . . . women's faces . . .
> With serpents' mouths and scalecophidian voids
> Where eyes should be, and nostrils full of toads.

The hero cries out that "love" is his God and begins a quest into the self that takes him through a Poe-like cityscape of sewers and luminous decay. Thomas describes the end of the self's inner quest in terms of a renovating baptism of the poet as his own redeeming Christ:

> So crying, he was pushed into the Jordan.
> He too has known the agony in the Garden.
> Had felt a skewer enter at his side.

In stanza twelve, the hero recounts the various ways he has sought to complete his quest. In a direct allusion to Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," the hero rejects Rossetti's sensuous heaven of soul and body: I have, he says, "Stuck straws and seven stars upon my hair, / And leant on styles and on the golden bar." Likewise, he has adopted the pose of a defiant Byronic hero such as Manfred:

> I've mocked the moving of the universe
> . . . There was commotion in the skies,
> But no god rose --
> . . . . . .
> . . . No god
> Comes from my evil or my good.

Finally, the hero yields up moral questions in despair for a pastoral life with the ancient gods of a pantheistic universe, "feeding birds with broken crumbs, / Of old divinities." This life reveals to him that "God's the love I hoped," which love unites all opposites into one: the opposites "Pair off, make harmonies" and the hero is "one with many, one with all." Two considerably darker poems, Poems Twenty-Seven and Twenty-Eight, are frustrated versions of the quest successfully completed in Poem Twenty-Four. Poem Twenty-Seven (N 195-96) is a sort of sullen perversion of Wordsworth's Intimations Ode. Therein, the poet is fascinated by the idea which he rejects: that childhood is not simply

a token of nature's loving kindness that can be seen afar from philosophic adulthood but rather a state that the aged ought to try to return to by somehow turning in time and voyaging back toward youth: "Pass through twelve stages, reach the fifth / By retrograde." Yet the vanity of this imagined voyage back to the beginning is futile, as in Thomas's apparent jibe at Yeats's famous operation: "Graft a monkey gland, old man, at fools' advice." The voyage from birth to death seems irreversible, the deterministic actions of the cells sending the newborn self into a world it will encompass or be encompassed by:

> Shall it be male or female? say the cells.
> The womb deliberates, spits forth manchild
> To break or to be broken by the world.

Life is thus defined as "childmind /become/ darker" as the long fall into adulthood begins. Poem Twenty-Eight (N 197-98), like Poem Twenty-Seven, is also an autobiography of the poet, its first line being later used by Thomas in his most successful poem in the Romantic version of this genre, the Altarwise sequence. Here, the growth of a lamb into a sheep and the passing of spring into summer, autumn, and finally into winter are compared to the poet: "first there was the young man who grew old." The return to childhood, lambhood, or spring is Thomas's lifelong serviceable solution that in the cycles of birth, death, and new birth the original state of childhood is achieved again but with different individual representatives whose forebearers find a similar unity in their "death" into a vitalistic cosmos. Art can only reveal a small portion of this large truth, or as the poet says, "I catch on a yard of canvas inch of wing."

A final group of poems dealing with the self's assertion of primacy over nature is considerably more affirming than the poems discussed above. An early version of the famous and obscure "Do you not father me"

(N 349) may be interpreted as a complex statement on the relation of the poet to his siring imagination and the external world. The opening stanza is a series of five questions spoken by the poet as a "tower" (cf. "Shut too in a tower of words" in "Especially when the November wind"). Addressing an unspecified "you" who may father, mother, sister, or brother the tower-poet, Thomas seems to be describing the possible relations of the poet to nature ("you"). All of these relations are sacramental fosterings of the poet as his own Christ: "Do you not father me . . . / The bread and wine, give for my tower's sake?" Stanza 2 reverses the direction of the words of familial relation, the poet claiming in Whitmanesque mood that he is father, mother, sister of the landscape he sees out of his poet's tower: "Am I not all of you by the erected sea / Where bird and shell are babbling in my tower?" The final stanza reiterates the burden of the Romantic poet as his own redeemer and addresses an unspecified figure of authority:

> Master, this was my cross, the tower Christ
> . . . . . .
> Sir . . .
> . . . I clatter from my post
> And trip the shifty weathers to your tune.
> Now see a tower dance, nor / yet do not see / the erected
> world
> Let break your babbling towers in his wind.

A dancing tower of Babel, this Romantic poet-as-Christ seems to be addressing God-as-imagination who empowers him to begin a dance of unity with the world that "fathers" him yet which he fathers. Further evidence for the "Sir" as imagination lies in the revised version of the poem where this figure becomes female and is identified by William Tindall as the poet's muse (RG 94). Poem Thirty-Two (N 201-02), a much simpler example, again identifies the world-redeeming poet as his own Christ:

> Interrogating smile . . .
> . . . . . .

> Pierced me with a pain another knew
> Who, once, a million years ago,
> Longed for the tomb, bled like a lamb,
> And knew forsaken horror on the tree.

The poet recognizes his power to create a new world ("a heavenly host of chords") but this vision is undercut by his other dominant view of life as an unending series of conflicting opposites which the poet strives constantly and furiously to unite. Even more affirmative is the fine, never collected poem "No man believes" (Poem Thirty-Three, N 202-03). Operating clearly within the Romantic myth, the poem devotes two stanzas to a catalogue of instances of death in nature, each of which inevitably forces the believer to question his "faith," a word which Thomas often uses in this notebook to mean the imaginative willing of a vision of the unfallen world on the ordinarily perceived landscape. Man's response to external decay is to create his own "god" within, almost certainly the shaping power of imagination, that confronts decay and causes it to imitate his own resurrection:

> And this is true, no man can live
> Who does not bury god in a deep grave
> And then raise up the skeleton again
> No man . . .
> Who does not break and make his final faith.

This warring of the poet against a mechanist's nature is also the subject of Poem Forty-Six, a substantially complete version of "Find meat on bones" (N 214-15). A dialogue between a father who urges his son to a lusty life and a son who bemoans his own satiety and age, the poem decries "the reason's wrong" that politicizes nature:

> The kingcraft of the cunning sky,
> Autocracy of night and day,
> Dictatorship of sun.

Even more than these Blakean tyrannical sky deities, the "jailing skin" of the timid human being is defied. In the last stanza, however, the

poet in his own voice resolves the debate by presenting a view of nature as loving, thus imaginatively unifying the viewpoints of father and son in this psychodrama:

> The stars still minister the moon,
> And the sky lays down the laws;
> The sea speaks in a kingly voice;
> Night and day are no enemies but one companion.

"Find meat on bones" in its presentation of two opposing views of man's relation to nature which must be resolved by the poet's unifying powers is the keynote poem of the February Notebook. Around it one may group two sorts of poems: (1) those that decry the poet's status as exile or bemoan the worsening burden of self-consciousness and (2) those that affirm or deny the imagination's power to heal the rifts between self and world, especially those caused by a tyrannical rationalism.

A nearly complete version of "Ears in the turrets hear" (Poem Forty-Seven, N 215-16) dramatizes the isolation of the poet from the outer world. The poet is both an island and a tower (imagination) to which ships and their sailors come to make threatening noises. A masterpiece of sound and rhythm in an essentially trimeter line with appropriate trochaic and anapestic substitutions (ll. 1,3, 21-22), the poem imagines threatening noises being made outside the tower door by surrealistically disordered pieces of the human anatomy (both his own and the intruders'):

> Ears in the turret hear
> Hands grumble on the door,
> Eyes in the gables see
> The fingers at the locks.

The tower is surrounded by "a thin sea of flesh / And a bone coast" beyond which lies the unreal outer world: "The land lies out of sound / And the hills out of mind." But fiery winds and anchoring ships entice the poet either to death or to salvation in the outer world:

Shall I run to the ships,
With the wind in my hair
Or stay to the day I die,
And welcome no sailor?
Hands, hold you poison or grapes?

Is the poet lured on by a correspondent breeze in sea and hair? In any case, the towered poet comes to know that his isolation from the world is no final solution as is that in "Do you not father me" where the tower multiplies itself and dances through the world. Other poems present figures more radically estranged than the fearful narrator-poet of "Ears in the turrets hear." Earlier it was shown that Poem Eighteen ("Make me a mask") dealt with the desire of the self to be shielded from the world. Similarly, the hero of Poem Twenty-Four kept off the pressure of reality by investive, a defiant Manfred-like railing at the cosmos, while the hero of Poem Seventeen, to be discussed presently, exercises his art in natural solitude apart from human company:

Even among his own kin is he lost
. . . . . .
Among all living men is a sad ghost.
(N 178)

The exile often bears the burden of self-consciousness. The poet may praise the man who never bears the burden -- "what's never known is safest in this life" (N 167) -- or, in a poem like Poem Thirty-Seven ("Why east wind chills"; N 204-06), he may ridicule the idiot questioner who attempts to reduce nature to the dimensions of pure reason. Questions such as

why east wind chills and south wind cools
. . . . . .
Why grass is sweet and thistles prick

we are told "the fool shall question till he drop." Rather than futile questioning, the poet says, waiting in contentment till death will bring non-rational answers to these questions wherein shall "the brain find

silence" when "all things are known" and the numinous powers of nature reveal themselves as they are: "ghostly comets over the raised fists." Of course, the poet himself cannot forebear asking searching questions himself as in Poem Twenty-One (N 184-85) where the lights of moon and stars cannot illuminate the poet's "blackness," his awareness of death, which forces him to "learn night's light or go mad," a task which takes up a large part of the generally gloomy February Notebook. One way to escape the blackness of consciousness is sleep, as in Poem Thirty-Eight, whose thesis is the strange idea that if one could "remember" one's sleeping life and thus unite sleep with waking consciousness then one might also unite death with the poet's language which rose out of unconsciousness just as life rose out of the void. Thus the poet's words and God's Word (Coleridge's two imaginations) are one -- "In the beginning was the word, the word began / In sleep no clock or calendar could time" -- and the poet is united with life-and-death as a single, unitary experience. A less confident confrontation of death by the poet is Poem Six (N 168), an early version of the famous "After the funeral." Very different from the later version in which the poet as bard conducts a funeral service over the dead aunt's grave and invokes love as a redeeming power that will transform the dead, this version reveals a self-conscious, ironic narrator detached from what he views as a disgusting, hypocritical funeral service for a person whose life had no meaning. Not even named or determined by sex ("he or she"), the corpse has simply deprived the locals of a source of cheap fun:

> Another gossips' toy has lost its use
> . . . . . .
> Another well of rumours and cold lies
> Has dried, and one more joke has lost its point.

A number of poems in the February Notebook associate self-consciousness with the evils of rationalism. An excellent example of such poems

is Poem Ten, "Out of a war of wits" (N 171-72). Its biographical background is probably the many late night political conversations that Thomas had with his socialist friend Bert Trick in Swansea, but the poem is also strikingly parallel to Whitman's short poem "When I heard the learn'd astronomer." Whitman's poem contrasts the lecturing astronomer's rationalistic explanation of the heavens to the poet's silent wonder before the stars themselves. In almost identical fashion, Thomas leaves the rooms of the heated political debate where argument governed intuitive response:

> Out of a war of wits . . .
> . . . . . .
> My brain came crying into the fresh light.

A worshipper in nature's church, the poet calls for "confessor" and silence for the "torn brain." The sun and the "clouds' confessional" then "sympathize" with his "asking arms" and grant the silence of deep momentary communion: "It is good to step onto the earth alone / And be struck dumb if only for a time." This momentary escape from the pain of rational argument does not obscure the dominance of the mechanistic view of nature in our time. Thus, Poem Twenty (N 183-84) laments the passing of the ancient bond between man and nature for the modern mechanization of agriculture. Now "man toils on an iron saddle" of a tractor, the "ploughshare's gone," and rural folk have migrated to the city as in these Eliotic lines:

> The wireless snarls on the hearth.
> Beneath a balcony the pianola plays
> Black music to a Juliet in her stays
> Who lights a fag end at the flame of love.

Limited to reason alone, men are "masters over unmastered nature" having only "the engine for companion / . . . under the unaltered sun." Poem Twenty-Six (N 193-95), to be examined later in detail, contains a similar

passage contrasting field and machine, bird song and factory whistle, reason and imagination -- "the dynamo and the harp."

If modern man worships the dynamo of reason, Thomas wants to play the harp, but the poems in this notebook that deal with the poet's powers over what he perceives seem as a whole less confident of success than those in the earlier notebooks. Poem Five, which warned that the prevention of self-consciousness is its only cure, also despairs of the power of poetry to heal the patient: "There was a time I could cry over books / But time has set its maggot on my track" (N 167). Indeed, the imagination may be reduced from a shaping to an imitating power as in Poem Fourteen in which the "ghosts" of Thomas's Welsh Non-Conformist upbringing control his poetry: "For there are ghosts in the air / And ghostly echoes on paper" (N 175). Similarly, Poem xxi, from the 1932-33 typescript, describes the poet and a friend walking in an "ordered garden" whose "ordered beds" symbolize a scientific rationalism and political conservatism that the speakers wish to overturn by language: "No tidy flower moved, no bather gracefully / Lifted her marble foot." Such failure may even lead to a jaded, detached mockery of those who would exercise imagination upon nature as in an early version of the fine poem "We lying by seasand" (Poem Twenty-Nine, N 198-99). Two friends lie on a strip of yellow sand by the sea. Although they have been called lovers encased in their love against the world (RG 152; WDT 248), neither version of the poem indicates this, and the more likely possibility is that "we" refers to two artists (Dylan Thomas and Dan Jones?) who observe the futile efforts of other artists to shape the external world. In the notebook version, the dominant colors of the poem are yellow, red, and gray. Lying on yellow sand, the speakers live in the quotidian of the physical world, a place of vitality (sun yellow)

and decay (jaundice yellow). The "grave" and gray sea that isolates the speakers on a sand bar is the oblivion into which the "yellow" of biological life must decay. The speakers accept these conditions of life, believing that their desires cannot change reality:

> We . . .
> . . . Mock / those / who deride
> Who follow the red rivers, hollow
> Alcove of words out of cicada shade.

As in "To-day this insect" (P 124-25), here too "cicada shade" is the brute reality on which the poet's imagination works. The "red rivers" suggest blood vessels, the pantheistic or ritualistic power in nature, or possibly nature in its unfallen state before it turned to yellow, grave, and gray. In any case, the speakers' words do not carve an alcove out of shade but are "spindwind," mere air though spun into poems, that vanish with the "yellow mists" of death. In the revised version of this poem (P 54), the "one-coloured sun" of dreary yellow more definitely hides the visionary form of nature which the speakers' poetic powers are too weak to overcome:

> The heavenly music over the sand
> Sounds with the grains as they hurry
> Hiding the golden mountains and mansions
> Of the grave, gay, seaside sand.

But this "red rock" of unfallen nature remains undisclosed. What is disclosed is the poet's heart that keeps its vigil of hope that the visionary (golden) world will break through the sullen world as it is (yellow): We "lie watching yellow until the golden weather / Breaks, O my heart's blood, like a heart and a hill" (P 54). Inner and outer landscapes (heart/hill) thus are one.

Not all of the poems on imagination are, however, despairing. Poem Nine (N 170-71), a long catalogue of the decay of Western culture after World War I, concludes with the Romantic idea (cf. Poem Thirty-Three)

that the asserting of individual "faith" by each man in his own god will reveal nature in its unfallen form -- "a star beyond the stars" --

> Faith fixed beyond the spinning stars
> . . . . . .
> In god or gods, Christ or his father,
> Mary, virgin, or any other
> . . . . . .
> Believe, believe, and be saved, we cry, who have no faith.

Thomas is enthralled with the idea that the assertion of faith, an act of imagination, will cause that faith to be: the poet can actually create his own world just as God did when He exercised primary imagination in creating the universe. This, to me, is the key to Thomas's famous poem "And death shall have no dominion," a slightly longer earlier version of which is Poem Twenty-Three (N 186-88) in this notebook. The subject of numerous critical analyzes, the poem is generally agreed to be a statement of Thomas's faith in a vitalistic universe in which death brings unity of being with everything in the universe and also fosters new individual life. Its title a variation on Paul's statement in Romans 6:9 "Death hath no more dominion," the poem's deeper significance is as a magical conjuration by the redeemer-poet, who, in the very act of asserting that death leads to cosmic unity and new life causes (or hopes to cause) that to be. Just as God in Genesis said "Let there be light and there was light," so the poet hopes his assertions will transfer their power from the world of words to that of things. The conjuration also accounts for the repetition of the title at the first and last of each stanza, the encapsulation of the to-be-resurrected particulars in the poet's magical phrasing. Death is merely the expansion of the limited earthly self into the "cosmic I" of Thomas's beloved Whitman (whom he may echo in the third line):

> Man, with soul naked, shall be one
> With the man in the wind and the west moon
> . . . . . .
> He shall have stars at elbow and foot.

Compare lines 713-16 of Whitman's Song of Myself:

> under the paling stars of the morning
> My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
> I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents
> I am afoot with my vision.

A more direct confrontation of the problem of the limits of imagination is Poem Seventeen, "See, on gravel paths," which, though ignored by critics, Thomas, at least, thought enough of to quote from years later in one of the BBC broadcasts on childhood (QEOM 4). Although untitled here, the poem was published in 1935 under the title "Poet, 1935" (N 306), a title which suggests that this poem may be another spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet up to that year. Closely following the Romantic myth, Thomas opens the poem with the description of a poet who is at one with a nature of the Romantic wind-harp and correspondent breeze:

> See, on gravel paths, under the harpstrung leaves
> He steps so near the water that a swan's wing
> Might play upon his lank locks with its wind.

Yet almost at once, unity gives away to severance as the voices of nature "make discord with the voice beneath his ribs." Looking to the stars, he desires to return to the unfallen world and is not satisfied with the fully perceived naturalism of Keats as in these derivative lines:

> Summer to him
> Is the ripening of apples,
> The unbosoming of the sun
> And a delicate confusion in the blood.

Estranged from nature's visionary form, he is even more estranged from men, and he finds consolation in communion with the landscape: He "walks with the hills for company / And has the mad trees' talk by heart." Unable to redeem himself by love and "weary with images" of aesthetic withdrawal, he tries to restore the fallen world by exercising his images upon it. Yet he finds that although "an image . . . / Hastens the time

of the geranium to breathe" and although "old flowers" can be made to "cut capers / Choreographed on paper," inevitably "the image changes and the flowers drop" as imagination fails to sustain itself against the deathliness in nature. Still, as "the gods' man," the poet-redeemer has visionary moments when nature's forms become a language of hope that he can read:

> the exceeding joy . . .
> . . . . . .
> Out of a bird's wing writing on a cloud

and "there in the sunset and sunrise / Joy lifts its head." Now the "harpstrung trees" arise and the poet, though alone, reads nature like a prophecy:

> The wind is his friend,
> The glow-worm lights his darkness, and
> The snail tells of coming rain.

Another striking poem that foreshadows Altarwise in its desire to be a complete spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet is Poem Twenty Six, "The first ten years in school and park" (N 193-95). Dividing his life into ages 1-10, 11-15, and 16-20, the poet records his movement from a carefree childhood through the disappointments of love to the "fall" into self-consciousness in which the two landscapes of childhood and adulthood would not align: "Past and present would not fit together / And I . . . was caught between the field and the machine." The whistles of birds and factories made a "dischord" (sic), and there was "no music in the dynamo and harp." But this fall into division may yet be followed by a restoration, we are told. Although

> five years found no hope
> Of harmony, no cure
> For bridging black and white

now "past and present . . . fit together" with the poet's discovery of his synthesizing imagination:

> Twenty years; and now this year
> Has found a cure.
> New music, from new and loud, sounds on the air.

As in Poem Seventeen, here too Thomas seems to be operating entirely within the limits of the Romantic myth. Other poems in the February Notebook embody parts of that myth.

The first principle of the Romantic myth is that the Christian pattern of creation, fall, and redemption is displaced into a secular and psychological context. Poem xvii (N 345-46) from the 1932-33 typescript discusses such an overturning of traditional Christian patterns. Using the metaphor of roadsigns that have been "displaced," Thomas sees that quest for redemption as more complex than simply accepting a single orthodoxy:

> With windmills turning wrong directions,
> And signposts pointing up and down
> Towards destruction and redemption.

Even the trinity itself now seems guilty of "windy wrongs" and the Christian worldview is internalized and individualized:

> The wind has changed, blown inside out
> The coverings of light and dark
> Made meaning meaningless

so that now "there's a choice of signs" and those who follow the old "To Heaven" sign take "altered roads." Another poem on the transition from a Christian to a merely personal worldview is Poem Fourteen (N 175-76), a substantial revision of "I have longed to move away." The theme of this poem is the mixed feelings of the poet in desiring yet fearing his own assertion of Romantic autonomy as a poet, an assertion that demands the rejection of the Christian worldview and the mores of the society based on those values. Though he has "longed to move away / From the hissing of the spent lie" he fears that "some life, yet unspent, might explode / Out of the lie hissing on the ground." Of course,

Thomas did "move away" as in Poem Thirty-Three where, as we saw earlier, he calls on each man to bury and raise up again his own god and faith. The prophecies of this god are to be read in nature. Poem Forty-Two (N 210-11), an earlier, longer version of "Here in this spring," closes with the poet's description of his god as a motivator of feeling and will which he domesticates like a beast of burden: "I have a stable god / In stall, heart's fodder, and will's whip." Aided by this odd deity, the poet chooses his poetic symbols from the four seasons which he distinguishes by certain prophesies. The stars are prophetic -- "tealeaves on curd" they are called -- as are the lowliest forms of animal life: "A worm tells summer better than the clock, / The slug's a living calendar of days." Here, Romantic displacement is complete.

Poem Forty-Five (N 212-14), "We have the fairytales by heart," considers the fall into self-consciousness to be the misguided abandonment of childhood sensibility and the imagination as symbolized by "fairytales." Adulthood, the poet says, brings an end to our belief in orthodox religion and the oppressive class society of "the old gang" of Auden's phrasing. These are "old spells" that were evil and are now "undone"; however, adulthood also brings an end to our belief in fairytales where ideals could be realized in a deathless world. In the line "We know our Mother Goose and Eden" Thomas clearly associates childhood fairytales with the unity of being that Romantic poets may associate with childhood. Grown up, we know death and evil, and, Thomas argues, this is a direct result of abandoning our belief in fairytales, a reversal of the proper order -- "we have the stories backward" -- by which we should have believed more strongly in the fairytales to overcome thereby the threats of evil and death. We have "torn out magic" and now death and evil are "too slow in heading words"

that would obliterate them. Our one choice, though, is to attack death and evil by fostering in ourselves again the imaginative truth of the fairytales, and thus, to regain the state of childhood consciousness:

> Tear by the roots these twin growths in your gut;
> Shall we learn fairy tales off pat,
> Not benefit from that?

Like this poem, Poem Fifty-One, "The minute is a prisoner in the hour" (N 220), follows the pattern of the Romantic myth. The poem retells the story of a profoundly significant Romantic "moment" of insight: a vision of the creation of the unfallen world of nature and of unfallen man. Stanza 1 describes the poet's senses as guardians of the special "minute" of insight that keeps trying to escape from eternity and the mind "into the den of days." The moment itself is a memory of "the frail / First vision that set fire to the air," a vision that causes "wonderment" in the poet. In stanza 2, the poet recalls the unfallen world as a place where man-as-god lived with truth until the fall, when man was separated from truth which resided thereafter in the forms of fallen nature:

> . . . a giant's voice
> Told truth and rang the valley with its crying;
> With falling wind down fell the giant's shout,
> The meaning dropped and truth fled to the grass.
> Deep in the valley's herbs I hear it dying.

In the final stanza the poet distinguishes those who, like his hero Blake, "see a living vision of the truth" and live in the unfallen world from those who, like himself, see that vision "once only" and keep it alive in memory as proof that the goal of the poet's imaginative striving is real:

> I shall . . .
> Keep in my memory the minute lonely
> Of truth that told the dead and showed the blind.

As in Poem Forty-Five, here too there is that the fall into division may be overcome by a rejuvenation of the spirit of the fairytale or by the cherishing of a moment's vision of the unfallen world. In one final poem to be considered as exemplifying the Romantic myth, Poem Thirty ("Before we sinned"), an earlier version of "Incarnate devil," Thomas concentrates with unusual intellectual energy on the original "fall" of man and the nature of that fall.

In its revised form known as "Incarnate devil," the notebook poem "Before we sinned" is a slightly obscure but suggestive discussion of the "fall" in terms of the Romantic myth. In the notebook version, which, although containing the essential idea of the poem, is inferior to the later version in phrasing, the fall of man is recounted from a seemingly Christian perspective (with some wryness) and then from the Romantic perspective. In the first stanza the "incarnate devil" as snake offers forbidden fruit (presumably to Adam and Eve though they are not mentioned by name and the "we" could be read in a non-Christian context). The "half awake" recipients awaken into full consciousness while "god incarnate" rather insouciantly offers the offenders immediate pardon without the slightest hint of scolding or the evil of their guilt. The result of the fall is not at all abstract knowledge of good and evil but only the perception that all of nature now has a double aspect, fallen and unfallen, an emphasis that pushes the myth further from the Christian to the Romantic. The unified consciousness of the offenders is broken, not because they are estranged from direct communion with God, but because nature "split" in two: the moon "talked good and evil till a world of fears / Grew sick around us, and made foul our words" and when the stars "crept breathing from their shrouds / Half were sweet signs and half were scars." In the final three stanzas, the

fall appears in its Romantic guise. The poet recalls that in "our Eden" (= childhood) we knew both good and evil (unity/disunity) in our communion with unfallen nature: "in crystal waters that no frost could harden." In fact, unlike the Christian version of the fall, the poet here claims that the fallen ones were aware of good and evil before they sinned:

> Before we sinned we knew all evil
> . . . . . .
> Before we sinned we heard god's words,
> Condemning and then pardoning.

Hard to grasp, Thomas's intention must be so say that the true fall is the fall of mind into the moral categories of good and evil, a fall that results from the child's passage into adult consciousness and the subsequent loss of direct access to a vision of unfallen nature. This point is supported in the last stanza where the pre-fall knowledge of good and evil seems to derive from the human observation of changes in nature, the unfreezable crystal waters giving way to "snow that turned to ice." To be human is to fall: the eating of the apple was irrelevant because the "fall" is a psychological necessity, not an avoidable moral transgression.

The finished version of "Before we sinned," entitled "Incarnate devil," in its superior phrasing and regularized stanzas clarifies certain points in the thematically similar notebook version. Reduced to three packed stanzas, the myth of the fall is told therein in its Christian, pagan, and Romantic versions. However, the Christian version is parodic, the "talking snake" appearing as the true creator (Eden is called "his garden") as well as tempter while God appears as a kindly buffoon passing out pardons like leaflets: ". . . a fiddling warden / [Who] played down pardon from the heavens' hill." The Christian fall

into the categories of good and evil seems ludicrous, as Satan as serpent appears to be kin to Blake's idea of evil as necessary energy to balance the passivity of good, a point made by Walford Davies (SP 107). Stanza 2 seems to praise pre-Christian religions where Priapian nature deities unified good and evil into a whole: "The wisemen tell me that the garden gods / Twined good and evil on an eastern tree." These lines can incorporate the Christian myth within their range of meaning but they also go beyond it. Instead of the "half holy" Christian mood (the good severed from its evil) one had the pagan moon that was at once "black as the beast and paler than the cross." Finally, in stanza 3, "our Eden" of childhood (or possibly the womb; SP 107) incorporates both Christian and pagan myths. The "cloven myth of Christian morality"is the Romantic estrangement of self from the "sacred waters" and the unfallen "mighty mornings of the earth" of pre-Christian times. The final line -- "A serpent fiddled in the shaping time" -- is enigmatic. The "fiddling warden" of God (l. 5) is replaced with the serpent as the true creator of man -- possibly because by tempting man to fall the serpent (self-consciousness?) opened the way for a later synthesis between man and nature at a higher level, the Romantic poet thus meeting the test of becoming his own redeemer? Of course, as nearly always in Thomas, the "serpent" may be phallic so that the awakening of adolescent sexual desire is associated with the fall out of childhood Eden. Walford Davies is helpful here in his remark that the fiddling serpent of the final line is the Blakean idea that the Christian god was really Satan who oppressed man with moral charades (SP 107). In any case and in either version, the poem is a sophisticated effort to dramatize the Romantic myth of the fall by comparing and contrasting that myth to the Christian and presumably also a pre-Christian version. There now remains to be examined,

more briefly, poems in the February Notebook whose subjects are nature, love, or which contain notable instances of Romantic poetic devices.

Thomas's attitudes toward nature in the February Notebook have already emerged in the discussion of the problem of the relation of self and world just completed. Therefore, all that seems required at this point is a brief enumeration of these attributes. Probably the most striking difference in Thomas's view of nature in this notebook is the intensified awareness of the nature of common perception as fallen, self-divided, full of symbols of death as well as life, an ongoing process of death and rebirth. Concomitantly, the poet's drive to perceive nature in its unfallen form becomes more problematic though the quest is intensified, not abandoned. Thomas certainly opposes the mechanistic view of nature, a reduction of rationalistic man, who rides the fields on an iron saddle. Men whose capacities for wonder is so atrophied that they reduce nature and her glory to their own meager dimensions are also mocked. Yet nature may certainly contain us, may even conduct a burial service for the war dead in her bosom (N 217), or more darkly, determine the course of our whole lives in the birth cells (N 195). Nature is inscrutable to reason, whose questions as to why nature is as she is are folly (N 204f.). She is also inscrutable to shallow poets who glibly pronounce their intimacy with her -- "every nature-writer from Fleet-street" (N 173). Our greatest efforts to redeem nature from her fallen state may fail (N 343) or the very effort of trying to shape nature may be mocked as futile (N 198-99). Still, a significant majority of the poems in this notebook present nature as a desired object of union with the self.

Whether its message is good or bad, nature is a storehouse of symbols and prophecies. Thomas twice refers to nature's "sky signs"

(N 167, 171) that prophesy estrangement in the one case and divine presence in another. The glow-worm and the snail prophesy the poet's enforced isolation from unfallen nature as does "a bird's writing on a cloud" (N 179). The stars are tea leaves while the poet and nature are interconnected by his symbols drawn from her store: "Symbols are selected from the years' / Slow rounding of our seasons' coasts" (N 210). Nature is also a source of communion and escape from intense self-consciousness. The simple coming of morning after a terror-filled night (N 344) or the interpretation of the stars as they pass may yield a single answer: "Be content" (N 206). Even the toil of poetic composition may be eased by direct communion: "How good it is to feel November air / And be no words' prisoner" (N 348). The poet may even find God and love in a shepherd's life (N 191), or nature itself may approach the condition of the poet's art in its "harpstrung leaves" (N 177). Even more dramatically, nature may seem to approach the condition of human feelings. A long endurance of the mind's and the night's terrors is alleviated by the elevation of one's eyes to the personified heavens: "the living sky, the faces of the stars" (N 345). In an uncharacteristic poem on classical myth, nature sympathizes with Electra's loss (N 208) while the poet, like Keats in the Nightingale Ode, envies the oblivious contentment of a bird: ". . . a pigeon calls / And knows no woe" (N 209). Poem Sixteen (N 176-77), an early version of "On the Marriage of a Virgin," describes the sun as an "immortal lover" of a virgin whose thighs be pierced with his rays before abandoning her to a mundane human lover. Finally, nature may be seen as infused with the divine. Oppressed by rational debate, the mind may offer itself up to the "clouds' confessional" as the "sun heals, closing sore eyes" (N 172). Or faced with the proposition that "gods are thunder," the mind may wittily and some-

what ironically elaborate to say that if divinity is present in thunder it must be present in all natural events:

> Shall it be said that this man's face
> Is but the face reflected of some god
> Admiring the acres of his brow? (N 221)

Thomas's whole poetic life could be scrutinized as an attempt to find grounds for an unreserved affirmation of that question.

As equally self-divided as Thomas's attitudes toward nature in the February Notebook are his attitudes toward love. More than any other Romantic trait examined so far, love as a redeeming agent suffers the greatest loss of power in the poet's eyes, a loss that remains fairly constant until the poems of The Map of Love. Possibly the natural result of his own adolescent experience of love's frustrations, several poems in this notebook depict love as futile or lethal. Poem Eighteen ("Make me a mask") calls for a mask to repel the outer world where the poet perceives "Others betraying the inner love" (N 180) that motivates him. The degradation of love is sometimes associated with Eliotic cityscapes as in the typescript poem xviii where we are sardonically told of "a girl whose single bed held two / To make ends meet" (N 347) or in Poem Twenty Four whose hero quester sees in the dark night-time city, women's faces "with serpents' mouths and scalecophidian voids" (N 188). Such fatal women even thwart the poet's success in finding a redemptive love as in Poem Three (N 165). Echoing the opening verse of Genesis, that would become the final line of Poem Fifteen in the August Notebook (N 240), the poet associates the beginning of love with an internalized experience of the creation and the fall. Had the girl not loved the poet,

> there would have been no beginning
> . . . . . .
> I would not have gone up to the places of the angels
> Seen heaven, known hell.

Like Christ on the cross, the poet has thus "known . . . vinegar" though before the fall "the wind of heaven . . . / Stirred . . . in my hair." The fall from love changes the poet and his lover (who seems internalized here) to Medusan creatures:

> My hands . . . changed to snakes
> . . . . . .
> I parted the serpents from her brow.

Both inner and outer loves may fail, leaving the poet with his words which he forms into "roofs / Of words" to house, museum-like, "the bits and pieces of dissected loves" (N 348). The most satisfying form of love as a unifying power is necrophilia. Poem One (N 163-64) describes a world of death that is a "friend" to the poet: "Companionship with night has turned / Each ugly corpse into a friend." Other "friends" include feasting maggots, vultures, and "the redcheeked vampire of the neck." Similarly, Poem Forty-Eight (N 217-19) is spoken by a woman who lovingly dwells on the delights of a dead soldier's buried corpse:

> Sweet is the waxen blood, honey the falling flesh;
> . . . . . .
> No cradle's warmer than this perished breast.

Other corruptions of love include religious prudery as in the savage poem with its obvious pun, Poem Fifty-Three (N 222):

> The Reverend Crap, a holy pimp
> . . . . . .
> Loves . . .
> . . . . . .
> To stroke the girls behind the organ.

Onanism is another wasting of love's potential. Poem Eleven (N 172-73) restates the old belief that a man's supply of seed is limited, does not resupply itself, and thus should not be wasted; similarly, Poem Forty Three argues that escape from self-consciousness in death or intoxication by "a chemist's lotion" or in spilling one's seed "on Onan's mat" is inferior to escaping by love for another, "a full vessel." Of course, if

the lover entices the poet towards sex but then refuses, as in Poem Twenty-Five ("Not from this anger, anticlimax after"; N 191-92), the poet may be forced to Onan's mat in the end, for, in another of Thomas's awful puns, the girl was unaware of how males react "to offers for a home for semen." In spite of Thomas's doubts that love can redeem, a few poems still assert love's power. Poem Three is discussed just above. Poem Thirteen (N 174) describes a meeting of two commonplace lovers in a degraded city setting. Still, the lovers have their "moment" of transcendence under the street lamps: "One minute / Their faces shone." Poem Twenty Three ("And death shall have no dominion") describes love as a vital power impervious to death: "though lovers be lost, love shall not" (N 186) while Poem Sixteen describes the relationship of a virgin with the sun as a ravishing and the sun's relinquishing of the girl to her less magnificent human lover as "a sacrifice," nature's sacrament to man! Finally, in Poem Twenty-Four, the hero who is burdened by self-consciousness finds healing in a pastoral life in which God himself is revealed as an aspect of nature and of love: "My God's a shepherd, God's the love I hoped" (N 191).

There now remains to be summarized briefly only the various Romantic devices and forms in the February Notebook. As all of these devices and forms have been examined in the course of the earlier discussion of self, nature, imagination, and love, they may be simply reiterated here. Certainly a striking trait of this notebook is the greater number of poems in which the poet is characterized as his own Christ or redeemer (Poems xx, Seventeen, Twenty-Three, Twenty-Four, Thirty-Two, Thirty-Three, Thirty-Nine, Forty-Two, and Forty-Eight). These poems prefigure the so-called "creation" poems of the August Notebook that are really responses to the "fall" poems of this notebook. Several poems in the

February Notebook follow the pattern of the Romantic myth, several of these being in the tradition of the internalized quest (Poems Twenty-Four, Twenty-Six, Twenty-Seven, Twenty-Eight) though none is a striking poetic achievement. The Romantic "moment" of insight occurs less frequently (Poems Thirteen, Thirty-Nine, Fifty-One) though the last of these is an important instance. As in the previous notebooks, Thomas here writes poems on the process of poetic creation and the dejection that follows the failure of imagination to sustain itself (Poems xix, Five). Two poems are attempts at constructing a spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet (Twenty-Six, Twenty-Eight) though neither is very profound. The Romantic figure of the dancer is significantly absent here, after appearing frequently in previous poems, another indication that the February Notebook initiates the main part of Thomas's vision of the fall into self-consciousness. On the other hand, the Romantic wind-harp and correspondent breeze seem present in Poems Seventeen, Twenty-Six, xix, and Five. Finally, the Romantic desire to link "words" and "things" continues to be prominent in Thomas's forthright descriptions of nature as language (Poems Forty-Two, and elsewhere) or language as the source of nature as in Poem Thirty-Eight. This latter idea informs an important poem in the August Notebook, Poem Fifteen and to that notebook, the last, we now turn.

The August 1933 Notebook. That the August Notebook marks Thomas's substantial arrival as an important poet seems undeniable. From the forty odd poems in this notebook Thomas chose thirteen of the eighteen poems in 18 Poems as well as five poems for Twenty-Five Poems. As Maud points out (N 33), poems in this volume mark the emergence of the endless "process" of birth and death as an obsessive theme. Even more importantly, however, the many poems that address the central Romantic problem of the

relation of self and world begin to fall clearly into the three phases of the Romantic myth -- creation, fall, redemption. Almost certainly, Thomas was aware that he had appropriated this myth as a structural device for his poetry, for an ever greater number of poems explicitly identify the poet as his own Christ or redeemer, a central act that indicates that the "myth" had been displaced from Christian into the purely personal and psychological terms of the Romantic version of the myth. Again and again, often in the most strikingly original images, Thomas strives to identify the self and the world as he so often said in the letters that he would endeavor to do. Undoubtedly, the awareness of "process," the natural cycle of birth and death, led Thomas first to identify himself with the cycles but second to hope for some final end to these cycles in a vision of unfallen nature, some final religious apocalypse, or the poet's own exercising of imagination in the world. This central act of appropriating the Christian myth for Romantic purposes is the crucial action of the August Notebook, a crystalization of various Romantic traits, forms, and devices examined in the juvenilia and the earlier notebooks. Thus, the examination of this notebook will concentrate mainly on the key poems that embody the struggle to articulate the Romantic myth, a struggle most fully triumphant in the post-Notebooks sonnet sequence, Altarwise by Owl-light. That sequence, along with sixteen post-Notebooks poems from the 1934-36 period, will form the final selection of poems to be analyzed in this chapter.

Three short poems at the beginning of the August Notebook may be read together as embodiments of the phases of the Romantic myth. Poem Two (N 226) describes the efforts of the poet to restore himself to the unfallen world by the pure assertion of desire. In a polysemous metaphor

in which sexual, religious, and poetic fruition are woven into one, Thomas associates the act of poetic composition with the return to a vision of creation. Like Carlyle in Sartor Resartus, Thomas distinguishes divinity from its various "clothes":

> Let . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . gods be changed as often as the shift.
> God is the same though he be praised as many.

The pure assertion of belief in one's own inner god (the poem occurs in sleep or "maieutic slumber") may yield a vision of creation ("the first living light") and a prophetic utterance by the Romantic child associated with the Edenic consciousness: "The child tells . . . / God shall be gods and many deaths be death." Emerging from within the unconscious, the vision of creation and the prophetic child, who foretells the final battle between imagination and death, depends on the poet's "virgin lines" that mate with a "circle" on "the blank sheet of sleep," an image that fuses the Virgin Birth with the poet's own virgin birth of the secondary imagination. Poem Twelve (N 238) is a fantastic description of childbirth in which the child's gestation and birth result in a total identity between inner and outer worlds (the child and the cosmos) and a re-enactment within the twin consciousnesses of mother and child of the creation, fall, and the promised redemption. Every child is a Christ. The first stanza describes the inner world of the pregnant mother in terms of events from the Old and New Testaments: the burning bush, the Israelites in the wilderness, the crucifixion all seem obscurely equivalent to impregnation, gestation, and labor. Stanza 2 makes the inner/outer analogies explicit in its depiction of " a universe bred in the bone" and an inner night and stars that guide the poet's Magi-consciousness to the scene of the great event: "Here a

mild baby speaks his first word / In the Bethlehem under the skin." In the universe of the womb, the child becomes a Christ with a tatooed cross on its breast (the breastbone?) and a "scarlet thorn" on the skull (blood vessels?). Each birth, in other words, is an evolution from a perfect unity between inner and outer worlds (the womb) into an imbalance (life in the world) which makes every child (everyman) his own Christ, his own redeemer, whose task is to restore the balance between inner and outer. A more interesting but more arguable way to read this poem is to imagine the mother as the poet and the child as the poet's evolving sense of estrangement from the balance of self and world. Once "born" into self-consciousness (= crucifixion), what can the poet do? Poem Ten (N 236-37) is the poet's plea for his own inner redeemer to create an apocalypse in which the two orders of inner and outer world shall become one. Stanza 1 prophesies that the god of the self, "the lord of the red hail /blood/," will one day burst the "can of blood" (the body) releasing the "brimstone" and burning arrows of redemption into the world. Like the redeeming blood from Christ's side caught in the grail, of this red lord the poet says that "sweet shall fall contagion from his side" destroying the distinction between inner and outer. In stanza 2 the inner god's uttering of "the golden word" destroys the outer hemispheres and then externalizes the hidden regions of the mind that simultaneously are divinized: "The fields yet undivined behind the skull / And made divine by every lightning rod." Inner mind and outer matter fade as categories of perception, leaving, in the image of the singing sea-shell, a world in which art and outer nature are one: "Both mind and matter at the golden word / Shall fall away, and leave a singing shell." Space and thought, earth and heart shall become one "golden soul" the poet foresees, and he concludes with

an apostrophe: "How soon, how soon, o lord of the red hail!" Taken together, Poems Two, Twelve, and Ten clearly demonstrate the internalization of the three phases of the Romantic myth and they further show the key figures of the Romantic child (whose "Eden" Thomas backs up into the womb itself) and the poet as his own Christ or redeemer. Other poems are more obscure imagifications, to use Maud's word, of the phrases of the myth, while a few poems attempt to cover all three phases at once.

Several poems key on the "creation" phase of the myth. A unified sensibility may be associated with a sacramental nature, the experience of one's own childbirth, an awakening apprehension of the unity between the evolving individual consciousness and the evolving outer world, or else a feeling of identity between God's creating word and the poet's creating words. Poem Six (N 229-30), "Shiloh's seed," presents a sacramental view of nature, union with which is all that is required of the poet for salvation. The poem reminds one of the style of Blake's Songs and this impression is leant support by a query in Thomas's own hand at the bottom of the page -- "Southcott?" -- which Maud discovered to be an allusion to Blake's poem "On the virginity of the Virgin and Johanna Southcott" (N 28). Maud glosses Thomas's notation and use of the biblical "Shiloh" as follows: "Thomas's own footnote refers us to Johanna Southcott (1750-1814), a domestic servant who identified herself with the 'woman clothed with the sun' of Revelations. Although sixty-four she promised to give birth to a son, the Shiloh of Genesis 49:10" (N 322). Blake's rather wry poem teasingly doubts Johanna's claim while it seems to sympathize with her general desire to see biblical events as manifestations of the self. Likewise, Thomas's poem denies that "Shiloh's seed" will be sewn in any single womb. Rather, nature itself is redemptive:

From the meadow where lambs frolic
Rises every blade the lamb
From the heavens falls a dove.

Similarly, all rain is "manna" and a "hundred virgins" will hide the "Prince's seed" of Christ, each falling grain that finds good or bad ground a "saviour." In the final three stanzas, Thomas argues that all the components of the Christian myth evolve out of life: doves must exist before the Dove, lambs before the Lamb (and, as he says in other poems, man before God). If this poem is Thomas's answer to Johanna Southcott, he seems to be saying that her error was her belief that she was fulfilling Christian myth rather than to see that myth as the consequence of living in a sacramental nature whose every man is Christ and every thing is holy. The Christian myth is secondary; nature and the self are primary. The poet's innate ability to see the life of the individual and the cycles of nature as correspondent in their enactments of the phases of creation, fall, and redemption may be traced to the poet's own creation in his mother's womb. Poem Eleven (N 237-38), "Before we mothernaked fall," argues that our physical birth orients us either to want the inner or outer world, an orientation we cannot overcome. Thomas calls the outer world the "land of gold" and the inner world the world of "oil," one's life being a staking of claims in the "quarry" or the "well." The poet identifies himself with the inner world -- "my liquid world" -- as opposed to a listener -- "Your solid land." As in the famous 1935 letter to Jones quoted in Chapter III, here Thomas chooses "the dark well of the brain" in which the tripartite Romantic myth is internalized. With an inborn bias toward the inner world, Thomas could write poems that attempt to describe simultaneously inner and outer processes, the goal of the polysemous metaphor. Two famous examples of this process are the notebook versions of "Light

breaks where no sun shines" (Poem Thirty) and "In the beginning (two versions: Poems Fifteen and Forty). The first of these, "Light breaks," appears at first to be simply another example of Thomas's cosmic identification of self and world. Clark Emery thus reads the poem (WDT 274-77) but adds significantly that the five stanzas, on one level, correspond to the life of the individual: conception, puberty, maturity, old age, death. One can agree with this reading, yet the final stanza offers us more than resignation. As Tindall points out (RG 63), the opening three lines of the poem may be read as an evocation of the dawn of consciousness, the physical act of conception, and the first creation of the cosmos. God made light before the sun; consciousness arises in the mind which is shielded from the sun. Lines 3-6 are another simultaneous description, this time of death and birth. The "broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads" may be the sperm which have broken out or else the forms of decay at whose forefront are worms: the point is that the poet's images can unite inner and outer, life and death, in a polysemous metaphor. Stanza 2 identifies the waxing of sexual potency in the individual with the larger identity of earth-bound man and the heavens: "Where no seed stirs / The fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars." Equally valid as a description of the embryo being born into the star-encircled world, these two lines forecast the birth of universal man whose body and the cosmos are one. Stanza 3 begins as a variation on the first three lines of stanza 1. Now "dawn breaks behind the eyes" while head and toes are poles whose sea is blood. The last three lines, however, say that the sky, which is not "fenced" or "staked" apart from man, responds sympathetically to the same divine force ("the rod / Divining") that reveals the paradox (smile, tears) of the human condition. The necessity for nature's

sympathy is made apparent in stanza 4: the cycle of the night encircling the "globes" (planets/eyes) limits the range of our perception just as cold strips winter of its clothes (vegetation) and daylight strips flesh to reveal bone. But this last, grim identity of the cycles of human and seasonal life is not the end. Stanza 5 seems to promise more explicitly what "And death shall have no dominion" only implied, that is, that the post-mortem unity of man and nature is not simply the unity of mutual oblivion but rather the dawning of a higher "cosmic consciousness" unhindered by death or by that death-dealing faculty of the mind, the reason. Thus, we are told that "light breaks on secret lots" (neither within the mind nor in the void before creation but in some nameless third realm including both) where the abstract thought of man and the things of nature are of a kind, "where thoughts smell in the rain." There, "logics die" and a mysterious process of creation occurs that is neither of "man" nor "nature" but of a supra-entity inclusive of both: "The secret of the soil grows through the eye / And blood jumps in the sun" (my italics). Having transcended all division and falls ("the waste allotments") the new universal consciousness begins an endless reign: "the dawn halts." Although not explicitly about the process of poetic creation, this final "dawn" performs all of the tasks traditionally assigned to the imagination. In Poem Forty (N 269-70), "In the beginning," the relationship between the idea of creation and the creating "word" is made clear.

The action of "In the beginning" is obviously a creation, primarily one assumes of the universe, but critics have felt compelled to go beyond this explanation though just how far one should go has been a matter of some debate. Attempting an orthodox Christian reading of the poem, even Rushworth Kidder concludes that Thomas is simply using

biblical myth for his own purposes.[9] Clark Emery points out that Thomas's views that Christ's sacrificial blood informed creation and that original creation was a mixture of good and evil are both highly unorthodox. Emery concludes that analysis is pointless, that the whole poem is just an emotional elaboration on Genesis and the first verse of John (WDT 197-98). In my view, Thomas is attempting to identify the poet's words and creative imagination with the creation of the cosmos and of the child, these latter two creations being the objects of simultaneous presentation in the five stanzas of the poem. This interpretation is suggested, but not demonstrated, by A. T. Tolley in his The Poetry of the Thirties: "The poem runs on two levels at once: it can be read as an account of the creation and as an account of the conception of the human child . . . a further level of interpretation also seems to be implied: an analogy between the creation of the universe, the creation of the human being and the creation of the poem -- together with the implication that the driving force is behind them all."[10] But are these three varieties of creation of equal weight in the poem? Here, as elsewhere, Thomas frustrates critics who would read such a poem as purely Christian or purely pantheistic statement. The most important point to be made about this poem is that Thomas is fascinated by the biblical idea that things come from words, that God's Word shaped the void into the world of light. As a Romantic, Thomas yearned to possess the same "magic" which explains his lifelong fascination with words. Here, in stanza 1 the original creation is dominant but the creation of a child is strongly implied in the images. The "three-pointed star" may be the trinity or the phallus, two instruments of creation that in lines 2-4 either enter the womb or the void, out of which they create "the first sun" (or son). Thomas may be saying that

original creation was of universal man for a "smile of light" crosses the "empty face" and a "bough of bone" (originally, "one rib of flesh," N 240) extends itself in air. Stanza 2 develops the idea that the world of things proceeded from the Word. Not only in creation does one encounter "burning ciphers" (constellations = secret codes) and the "pale signature / Three-syllabled" but events in biblical history are used to show the redemptive power of language. The "imprints on the water" may be God's creative word in Genesis or Christ's footprints on the Sea of Galilee: beyond either allusion, however, is the general idea that language is the tool by which the creative power in all its forms (God, sex, imagination) alters or even entirely forms that which exists beyond itself. The "stamp of the minted face upon the moon" could be the impregnation of any woman, of Mary, the original creation of a humanized cosmos, or the poet's exercise of his own imagination. Similarly, lines 5-6 describe the crucifixion, conception, and Noah's rainbow as evidence that nature is sacramental and is the working out of creative power. One may read "the cross tree and the grail" as sexual symbols, Christian symbols, or extensions of lines 2-3 where the construction "bough . . . a cross" puns on "crosstree" or even a distant image of the poet's pen and inkwell whose paper is a "cloud" and whose every word is a "sign." Stanza 3 contains further images of creation, this time, in terms of fire as well as of water, but the key stanza of the poem is stanza 4 wherein the identity between God and poet as creators emerges most explicitly:

> In the beginning was the word, the word
> That from the solid bases of the light
> Abstracted all the letters of the void;
> And from the cloudy bases of the breath
> The word flowed up, translating to the heart
> First characters of birth and death.

Thomas's early love of words for their own sakes and his non-rationalist,

expressivist theory of poetry, his fascination with process, and his desire to "translate" words into things and things into words are all present here along with a simultaneous interpretation of these lines as a description of the first creation -- with God as Thomas-like in His creative methods! Both inner and outer creative lights act on inner and outer voids by the medium of language. Finally, in stanza 5, the "secret brain" of God and the poet unite word and thing ("celled . . . in the thought") in potentia before producing ("forking") world and poems as word-things ("blood . . . scattered to the winds of light"). The final line of the notebook version, "a secret heart rehearsed its love," seems to say that the creative acts of God and poet were acts of transforming love. As printed in 18 Poems, the final line, "the ribbed original of love," returns to the idea in stanza 1 that all acts of creation -- by God, a father, the poet -- are aimed at one end: the creation of the cosmic Adam whose body and the universe are one and are sustained as one by the power of love. Tindall wittily suggests another of Thomas's almost incessant hidden puns the "ribbed original" may be the poet's own poem, set out of the page in rib-like lines of type (RG 62). In any case, "In the beginning" is a major effort by Thomas to unify into one the Word and words, the poet and the world, words and things, Christian myth and private poetic experience. Thomas, however, was not always so exultant in his portrayal of phases of the Romantic myth.

Several important poems in the August Notebook emphasize the fall of man. This fall is not the result of moral transgression but the inevitable consequence of birth, the agonies of self-consciousness and isolation being overcome in the twin extremes of pre-natal existence and death or else in a moment of vision when nature's unfallen

form is revealed to the poet. This last remedy is the subject of Poem Twenty-Two (N 248-49), "The eye of sleep." In a letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas indicates that she has suggested that he include "The eye of sleep" in the poems he was assembling for 18 Poems. Thomas's comment is that this poem in an earlier version is "very bad indeed": "I have rewritten 'The Eye of Sleep' almost entirely, and it is now a little better, though still shaky on its rhythms and very woolly as to its intention (if any)" (SL 116). That intention seems pretty clearly to compose a poem in which the quester poet escapes the fallen world and searches for nature in its unfallen, anthropomorphized form. The poem is cast in the form of a dream so that the poet's quest is internal yet figured forth in 'external' images so as to give the impression that the successful quest is a fusing of inner and outer realms into a single human-yet-natural mode of experience. As in "Before we sinned," here too the poet seems not to have fallen away from nature in its visionary form due to a deliberate act of sin; rather such a fall appears to be purely psychological, the consequence of dawning consciousness itself in the act of birth. The fall into estrangement is imaged as a kind of sleep, the rotated eyeballs being the "eye of sleep" that "turned on" (turned against/lit up) the poet like a "moon" (time/imagination). Fallen in time (i.e., aware of time and thus of death), the poet "journeyed through a dream," his own lip touching "the lip of darkness" of sleep and isolation. Stanzas 2-4 describe the poet's first stop on his inner journey, "a second ground, far from the stars" to get to which he has "climbed the weather," the word "weather" being one of Thomas's code words for both inner and outer states of being (as in "Poem in October"; P 178). Here he meets an image of his fecund but ever-changing feminine self, a "ghostly other, /

My mother-eyed," with whom he ascends to the clouds where a dialogue occurs. The gist of the dialogue is that the poet thinks he has ascended far enough to be already in the unfallen world which he describes sacramentally as a church -- a "globe" with a "nave." Insisting that these cloudy regions are his patrimony, the poet is dismayed when the "black ghost" of the "mother-eyed" tells him that merely breathing will cause to fade the "angelic gangs" that inhabit these clouds. The poet breathes and the angels fade, but so does the black mother-ghost -- opposites cancelling each other out -- as the poet ascends another time to a "plane" which is indeed the unfallen world. The cosmos is spiritualized. We hear that "the pulse of God / Hammered within the circling roads of fire," the "singing core" of matter is "the song of God," "starry spires," and a "columned cloud" from a temple of nature, all of these evidencing "the laws of heaven / And the mysterious order of the Lord." Like the inner "lord" of Poem Ten ("Not forever shall the lord of the red hail"), this lord is a ruler both of an inner and outer cosmos that unite into an anthropomorphic whole: the "faces of the spheres," "the comets' hair"). The awareness of time is lost in the cosmic temple to which the poet ascends: "there grew the hours' ladder to the sun." The poet's unaided quest in this poem to reach "upper nature" is matched by Poem Twenty-Nine (N 255-57), "When once the twilight locks no longer," a description in great detail of the experience of the fall into self-consciousness and estrangement as well as something of an autobiography of the poet as poet and as everyman.

The version of "When once the twilight" that appears in 18 Poems is neither simply a touching up of the notebook version nor is it a radical revision, but somewhere in between. The later version, however,

clearly develops what in the notebook version remains obscure: the poem is a description of what Wordsworth describes in the Intimations Ode as the continual falling away of the growing youth from the sense of spiritual oneness with nature that is the blessing of the child and of the prenatal soul. That poetic creation and the sense of arid depletion that follows is to be identified with the fate of the child and aging youth is made clear in the identical opening stanza of both versions. Various critics identify the "twilight locks" as sea locks, the poet's hair, or the doors to the womb and the speaker thus as God the creator, Thomas the creator, or everyman the fatherer of his own child. The activities of finger and fist suggest the scribbling poet, but an interpretation not to my knowledge put forth is that the phrase "twilight locks" in addition to these other meanings most centrally means the state of childhood consciousness in which poet and benevolent nature were one, just as twilight is that brief moment of balance between the primal opposites of day and night, light and dark, which it momentarily "locks" into a unity. The "finger" and "fist" thus become those of a grasping infant whose fall into self-consciousness begins as early as the moment when mother withdraws her breast from him (ll. 3-6). Simultaneously, the first stanza suggests that when the poetic imagination fails to sustain a balance between self and world, that faculty ("the waters of the breast") is dessicated. From here on, the notebook version of the poem is a long catalogue of instances of deathliness in nature that haunt the child-poet as he grows out of "twilight" and "the Sleeper's star" that governed him into the "living deaths" of self-consciousness that plague him. In the last stanza, the poet repeats the first two lines of the poem but with a difference caused by the addition of the final line of this version: "I did unlock

the Sleeper's eyes." As a poet he is claiming that the death of his own child self was really a self-willed act of the presently speaking "I" that may be interpreted as the poet's own mature imaginative power that desires not a return to childhood but a new unity with the world, a higher synthesis. In order to see fully Thomas's development of the idea, it is necessary to turn to the somewhat better structured version of this poem as printed in 18 Poems (P 97-98). Beginning with stanza 2, one finds that the weaning of the infant of stanza 1 was a cosmic weaning, the destruction of unity between the child and a maternal cosmos that occurred "when the galactic sea was sucked / And all the dry seabed unlocked." His own coinage, "galactic" combines lactic of the mother's milk with the galaxy of the Milky Way from both of whom the child is weaned. This first division is not absolutely catastrophic at first. As Thomas said in the letters, if the poet cannot reach up and out to become one with the cosmos, he can survey the cosmos within. Thus the cosmically weaned poet sends out "my creature" to investigate the body and to link it to the world by cosmic analogies: "that globe itself of hair and bone." As in the notebook version's final stanza, here too the "I" of the poem seems an overriding self that knows all along that the child must fall into self-consciousness in order that the greater "I" can act to synthesize the divided self and world. Stanza 3 describes the child's years of sympathy with nature in which he "held a little Sabbath with the sun" until he fell into a "sleep" of forgetful ignorance and "drowned his father's magics" (Imaginative sympathy with a benevolent nature). Stanzas 4 and 5 are a vision of death in fallen nature associated with the restrictiveness of orthodox Christianity in "the Christ-cross-row of death." Stanza 6 parallels stanza 2 whose

"creature" becomes "my own ambassador to light," a representative of the poet's questing imagination that seems transformed into reason that can only detect a materialistic nature of death ("a carcass shape") which is "conjured up" to deprive the poet of spiritual sustenance ("my fluids"). This deceived ("poppied") ambassador is rejected, the "I" of the poem orders the child ("my Sleeper") to wake from the nightmare sleep of reason and its reductive vision of nature. What the child will discover is stated in the poem's final lines:

> The fences of the light are down,
> All but the briskest riders thrown,
> And worlds hang on the trees.

As in "Light breaks" where "nor fenced" the divine waters of sky and eye could become one, here too the bravest questers pick their own "worlds" like apples from the trees, their search for "light" to complement "sleep" a facing of the facts that adult consciousness is a recognition of the necessary end of childhood's "twilight" world and the building up of new "worlds" out of the warring opposites of death and life. Unlike many of Thomas's poems, this one ends on a manly note of optimism that reminds one of "the philosophic mind" of the Intimations Ode.

Closely related to "When once the twilight" is Poem Thirty-Eight (N 266-67), "Where once the waters of your face." Again employing the polysemous metaphor, Thomas here describes, on one level, the fruition and aridity of an ocean on which the poet is a sea voyager and a womb in which he is also a voyager. However, the first three stanzas of the poem may be read more significantly as a description of the Romantic child's loss of the sense of wonder and the sense of undivided communion with a spiritualized nature.[11] Read in this way, stanza 1 describes a sea voyaging poet much like the ancient mariner who ex-

periences nature both as a place of communion and spiritual dessication. Addressing the ocean (and only secondarily, in this reading, a girl), the poet recalls his childhood feelings that nature is humanized, that the categories of "man" and "landscape" are artificial. Thus, the poet, turning Genesis around, speaks to the ocean about "the waters of your face" and of "mermen" (uniting man and nature) which have vanished now in favor of "your dry ghost" and "dry wind." Although "spun to my screws" suggests sexual intercourse, "screws" are also ship propellers, and, in "All, all, and all the dry worlds lever" they are the creative forces that "turn the voice" (P 106). This last meaning suggests that the poet's imagination that once shaped the outer seas can do so no more. The difficult second stanza is brilliantly explicated by Moynihan who rightly sees the image as that of the swirling waters of the Bristol Channel that "splice" the "tided cord" of the sea until low tide ("the green unraveller") cuts off the channel flow with bars and extended peninsulas.[12] Of course, an abortion is also suggested as Thomas's lines almost always seem susceptible of a sexual interpretation as well, the cut off lives of sea and child being strangely united in our knowledge that Thomas as a boy was once cut off by the tides on the Worm's Head peninsula in Gower. As Davies suggests (SP 102), the word "invisible" that begins stanza 3 suggests that he fecund sea apprehended by the child exists now only in the poet's memory where it fosters love ("the love-beds of the weed ") though in his present life "the week of love's left dry." In memory, the poet recalls his childhood in lines that echo Yeats, and Wordsworth's "shades of the prison-house" image from the Intimations Ode (SP 102). He addresses the remembered sea:

> There round about your stones the shades
> Of children go who from their voids
> Cry to the dolphined seas.

Davies glosses the final image of the dolphined sea as meaning that "that part of the poet which is still childlike continues to yearn for the rich world of the imagination" (SP 102). This reading is confirmed in the poem's final stanza where the sea-voyaging poet asserts that the child's vision of the sea will remain true. Described as a huge eye with "coloured lids," the sea is visionary "while magic glides / Sage on the earth and sky." Davies sees the "corals" and "serpents" that will remain in this sea as the inevitable mix of good and evil even in the child's vision of nature. However, the completely affirmative tone of these lines leads one to suggest that they may be the water-snakes of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner whose appearance signals on the mariner's regaining of grace. In addition, Thomas's beloved Gower peninsula called the Worm's Head, a snake-like protrusion that would be immersed in the rising tides of a full sea and channel, is probably suggested. All in all, "Where once the waters of your face" adheres very nearly to the phases of the Romantic myth. A less well finished but fascinating poem that Thomas never published is "Jack of Christ" (N 242-46), a version of the Romantic myth that makes use of various Christian elements.

The only critic to comment on "Jack of Christ" is T. H. Jones, who said that "though not in itself one of Thomas's best poems, it is one that is both technically and thematically very important to the understanding of Thomas since it reveals . . . his essentially religious nature and . . . the direction /his/ early work was taking."[13] Referring us to W. S. Merwin's famous and brilliant essay on Thomas entitled "The Religious Poet," Jones may have had in mind a passage such as the following from Merwin: "In most of the earlier poems the 'I' is 'man' trying to find a means of imagining and thereby redeeming his con-

dition; much of the seemingly baroque and motiveless 'agony' of the earlier poems stems from the desperateness of this need."[14] A good description of Romantic striving after reconciliation, Merwin's general statement and Jones' remarks apply to "Jack of Christ" which has so far not been analyzed by a Thomas critic. Poem Seventeen (Part One) is a description of the poet as Christ, the "Jack" of Christ, as he falls into the world of division where every event or thing transforms itself into its opposite in a seemingly endless display of man's fall into psychological disunity within himself and with nature. In addition, there is some correlation between the examples of the opposites in each stanza and the progression of the poet from original Edenic consciousness to the world of fallen nature, to a briefly happy childhood there, to youth, age, and finally death. At each point, the poet's search for images of unity of being yields these images' opposites until the end where the only unity between man and nature appears to be death. Stanza 1 introduces the formulaic syntax that governs the first five of the eight stanzas. The poet "fell" from "loss of blood" and water that turns to dryness (st. 1-2). This division of Eden into presence and absence, ghost and reality, image and thing gives rise to a vision of God as a victim of his own creation or else the tyrannical lie of orthodoxy:

> Where was no god I heard his windy visits
> And saw the spider weave him on her loom.
> And where god was his holy house was sculptured,
> A monster lie upon the middened land.

From upper nature and the writhings of the tyrannical creator of division, the poet falls into lower nature (st. 3) where good and evil are mixed: the "ugly vales" opposite the ravens whose "feather said a blessing from the trees." From this sacramental sign, the poet falls further (st. 4)

into an experience of the healing power of love and the child consciousness which are subsequently obliterated. Lack of love leads the poet to the discovery of love: "and there love sat, / My child did knock within her happy heart." But then love turns to a "fever" whose womb contains the burning, screaming child, in the endless transfiguration of opposites into themselves. In stanza 5 the poet seeks out a "remembered cave" (the womb?) where, as lover, he seeks to reenter the Eden of unconsciousness. Here, too, age cancels youth, and the poet falls again (st. 7-8), this time into the philosophic resignation of age and its lost senses (st. 7); but this "peace" is cancelled by the ultimate opposite: "When all is lost is paid the sum of death." If life is a matter of progression by opposites, what opposite stands against the grim fact of death? Poem Eighteen (Part Two) addresses this problem. The Jack of Christ addressing his father Jack who must be God the Imagination says that the "thieves" of Poem Seventeen who steal all the images of redemption -- the two natures, child, love, sexual union, philosophic resignation -- should not be hindered for life in lower nature is one of division: "and slopes and vales are blessed as they are cursed." This division is caused by a god of division, analytical reason, who is rejected in favor of a self-creating, unifying god that must be the poet's own unifying power of imagination:

> Where is no god there man believes
> And where god is his homage turns to dust;
> God who is all tells in his desert gust
> That one man must be all and all be one.

Overcoming death, the poet becomes the "newborn son" of god and ghost, his own Christ! Poem Nineteen (Part Three) is a demonstration of how the poet's faith-as-imagination works out in practice. Using the example of a young girl unbuttoning her blouse to reveal a firm breast

and the stars burning on in time, the poet tells us incredibly, that if only the girl and stars will assert "faith" (imagination or the willed assertion of desire) the young breast will never fall and the stars will never go out. Only "doubt" (the failure of imaginative perception) can cause external conditions to impinge upon inner desire:

> Should the girl doubt, a sallow ring
> Would rim her eyes . . .
> And should the stars blush . . .
> Ashamed of light
> Their manypointed light would drop.

Such "faith" or "trust" if exercised by "you" (the poet's audience) will translate each of us into eternal, star-like beings and our own self-redeeming Christs:

> You . . .
> Shall be star-fathered on the air
> And Jack of Christ.

So imagination and death are the ultimate opposites! One may recall here a passage from Harold Bloom's essay on the internalized quest-romance: "Romanticism guessed at a truth our doctors begin to measure; as infants we dream for half the time we are asleep, and as we age we dream less and less. The doctors have not yet told us that utterly dreamless sleep directly prophesies or equals death, but it is a familiar Romantic conceit, and may prove to be true. We are our imaginations and die with them" (my italics).[15] Though coming late in the day, Dylan Thomas longed to accept this belief and in many poems from the juvenilia to the last finished poem, "Author's Prologue," strove to foster imagination against death in the self and in the world.

Before we proceed to some poems in the August Notebook that deal more with the self/world problem than the creation/fall/redemption phases of the Romantic myth, two well known poems that are less striking instances of that myth deserve some attention. These are Poem Seven and

and Poems Twenty-Four/Twenty-Six (a single poem, continued). Poem Seven, "Before I knocked" (N 231-33) differs from the version in 18 Poems only by the presence of two stanzas later cut and two additional word changes. Most commentators feel that the central issue of the poem is the identification of the speaking "I" who has been called a sperm cell, an unreleased female egg, the unborn Christ, the unborn poet, or the "spirit" of the child entering its body at conception. As usual with Thomas, all of these possibilities seem simultaneously present and can be "worked out" to one degree or another. One's curiosity is heightened by the fact that Thomas commented in a letter to Miss Johnson in 1933 that "there is more in the poem, 'Before I knocked,' more of what I consider to be of importance in my poetry" (SL 49). This comment appears in the context of Thomas's remark, in the same letter (discussed in Chapter III), that all ideas, actions, and psychic states can be best presented in the poem through the imagery of the body (SL 48). In other words -- and this is a point sometimes hard to keep in mind because of the arresting nature of Thomas's imagery -- the idea of a poem like "Before I knocked" is expressed by but ultimately other than the pattern of images. The images, as the major explicators of Thomas have shown, describe the conception, gestation, birth, brief life, and crucifixion-death of a speaker who is essentially a composite of the poet and Christ. Now if Thomas knows himself, the true subject of the images that evoke pictures of these actions is our psychological experience of a fall from psychic unity (st. 1-2) into division (st. 3-7) and, in this poem, not redemption but death (st. 8-10). The biblical pattern of creation-fall-redemption is thus internalized in two senses: the images describe the inner processes of gestation and this imaged process of an action of the body figures forth the psychic experience

of a fall into self-consciousness. This psychic estrangement as the theme explains a point that puzzles some critics of the poem, the fact that the sperm or egg or embryo of the poet-Christ is conscious of its own conception both prior to and during that conception and is also conscious of its identity with external nature prior to birth. That "Before I knocked" is not an orthodox Christian poem describing the birth of Christ seems clear not only from Thomas's increasingly frequent identification of himself as poet with Christ but also in a prologue to this poem that appears above it in the notebook version:

> If God is praised in poem one
> Show no surprise when in the next
> I worship wood or sun or none:
> I'm hundred-heavened and countless sexed.

Maud says that in the notebook itself Thomas has drawn a small arrow from this prologue to "Before I knocked" indicating the relationship between the two. This self-divinizing and the assumption of a cosmic consciousness by the "I" of the poem may owe something to Whitman, as James Miller and Bernice Slote have argued, finding verbal echoes in Thomas's title line of lines from Song of Myself: "Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me, / My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it."[16] The parallel is striking, although Thomas's is a much darker poem which ends with no redemption, by sexual or poetic process or any other, in sight. In stanza 1 the poet-Christ begins the long descent from an all-knowing cosmic "I" into the shades of the prison-house of the self-consciousness and analytical reason. The "Jordan" river of line 3 recalls Thomas's letter, written four months prior to this poem (SL 15), in which he describes redemption in Romantic terms as a quest into the self to find the inner Jordan, here called "near my home" (Eden, childhood, womb). Stanza 1 also

contains a direct allusion to Blake in the poet's assertion that one of his many relationships was as "brother to Mnetha's daughter." A character from Blake's Tiriel, "Mnetha" has teased Thomas's best explicators to distraction. Tindall notes that Mnetha acts as "mother" to Heva, an old man but a "daughter" in relationship; thus, Mnetha's daughter is senility, or else a near anagram of Athena or an echo of Memory, and thus, something of a Muse (RG 37). Clark Emery presses the search furtherest to argue that Thomas, as Yeats said Blake originally did, thought Thel the daughter of Mnetha and thus meant his image to convey the idea of the divinity of imagination whose words and nature are one (WDT 203-04). Walford Davies is probably right in seeing the name's "exotic sound" as its main appeal to Thomas (SP 98), though the word's presence does lend support to critics who would argue for Blake's deep influence on Thomas's attempt to embody the Romantic myth. To these learned propositions one might add Harold Bloom's gloss of the relevant passage in Tiriel in which man must fall in order to achieve a higher synthesis later on.[17] Under the aegis of Mnetha, the speaker of Thomas's poem would be falling into Blake's state of Generation to escape Beulah and as prelude to the attainment of the state of Imagination or Universal Man. Davies, however, is probably right. In any case, stanza 2 describes the speaker's fall into the awareness of time (spring/summer, sun/moon) as a consequence of insemination, a kind of reductive entrapment of the cosmic "I" yet at the same time an event described in cosmic dimensions: "The leaden stars /⁀ sperm ⁀/ the rainy hammer / Swung by my father from his dome." Stanza 3 moves from insemination to conception. Ignorant before of the cycles of the seasons and celestial bodies, the about-to-be incarnate "I" now knows "the message of the winter" whose hail and "childish snow" I take to be

further images of the male seed. Shocked into life by breath and blood (wind/dew), the child is made up of "the valley weather" (the womb) or in 18 Poems "the Eastern weather" -- clearly associating the child with Edenic consciousness, though Thomas's system backs up the first phase of the "fall" from the child's aging into the adult to either the second the "pre-conceived" cosmic "I" enters the cycle of sexual creation or even some mysterious antecedent time beyond description: "Ungotten I knew night and day." This foreknowledge of inevitable fall is carried further in stanza 5 where the speaker first appears definitely as Christ-like. From the unconscious or else its opposite the supra-consciousness of the cosmic "I" ("the rack of dreams") the speaker's reason-governed psyche is formed -- a "living cipher" or zero governed by the "lily bones" (foetal bones/Easter lily). The liver is marked with "gallow crosses" and the crown of thorns antagonizes the psyche oppressed by its fall: "brambles in the wringing brains." Stanzas 5 and 6 make no progress on the ideas so far imaged (Thomas cut stanza 5 for 18 Poems), but stanza 6 presses here the point of stanzas 2 and 3 that psychic reality (the "I" and what it foreknows) is primary, physical reality secondary, an idea that fits in with the Romantic desire to exercise imagination in the world. Stanza 8 separates rather strangely the "I" from what it calls "my mortal creature" (the body or incarnate self?) that sails salt seas where tides touch no shores (= the waters of the womb and its salty sperm and/or the tides of time and the shores of eternity). This creature, like those who fall from Mnetha's Beulah in Tiriel into Generation, seem to benefit from the fall into the opposites -- "I who was rich was made the richer / By sipping at the vine of days." Stanza 8 recounts the death of the incarnate "I"; the personal pronouns seeming to follow the short prologue in identifying a multitude of Gods

and Christs in every father and son:

> I was mortal to the last
> Long breath that carried to my father
> The message of his dying Christ.

The final stanza, addressed by the poet to orthodox Christians, contains a bewildering series of pronouns, the brackets indicating the readings printed in 18 Poems:

> You who bow down at cross and altar,
> Remember me and pity him
> Who took my flesh and bone for armour
> And double-crossed his [/ my /] mother's womb.

Reversing the priestly exhortation to the church to remember Christ's sacrifice, Thomas asks that his own (and everyman's) life be seen as identical to Christ's. The pronoun "him" seems to refer to "my mortal creature" or particular incarnation of the ever ongoing cosmic "I" who doublecrossed" his mother's womb. Possibly Thomas's ultimate pun, "doublecrossed" can mean that (1) the speaker entered the womb as sperm and crossed it going out as child, (2) this poet-Christ figure was crucified by being forced out of the cosmic dimensions into a particular incarnation and then crucified again at death, or (3) that in the orthodox Christian myth Christ cheated (doublecrossed) Mary by (a) being God's not Joseph's son and (b), if we read "my" for "his" as in 18 Poems, by cheating all the mortal everyman-Christs of the human race by not really giving up his immortality in the incarnation and therefore cheating at the crucifixion by not really having to face death in the same sense a true mortal would. In "remember me" Thomas is saying that the poet-as-Christ is the real Christ, sent by his own godhead, as in a striking stanza from an otherwise weak poem, Poem Nine (N 234-36):

> Take the scissors to this globe,
> Firmament of flesh and bone
> Lawed and ordered from on high
> By a godhead of my own.

But "Before I knocked" is short on how the poet-Christ will carry off his self-redemption. One possibility is the redeeming power of love. The difficulties involved in love as a redemptive agent are the subject of a final instance of Thomas's attempts to embody the phases of the Romantic myth, "From love's first fever to her plague" (Poems Twenty-Four and Twenty-Six, combined; N 250-51, 252-53).

Another of Thomas's early autobiographies of the poet, "From love's first fever" is considerably easier to grasp at first reading than some of its fellows. The first four stanzas describe the birth and childhood of the poet in terms entirely consistent with the Romantic figure of the child as symbol of unity of being. The child lived in a sacramental nature, his world "christened" by mother's milk, his throat learning the "miracle" of speech, the blood that "blessed" the body, and the whole outer world as a church, the "nave of heaven." As a young child, the poet is identified intuitively with a world in which there were no divisions:

> All world was one . . .
> And earth and sky were as one airy hill,
> The sun and moon shed one white light.

As an older child (st. 2) the poet still lived in a holy world, but the inevitable emergence of the analytical faculty -- reason -- begins. A vague fear ("The warring ghost") that his unitary consciousness will pass is evidenced in his discrimination of the "one airy hill" and "white /uniting all colors/ light" of earth and sky, sun and moon, into colors and numerical divisions: "The sun was red, the moon was gray, / The earth and sky were as two mountains meeting." Still, even with the growth of sexual desire ("the rumour of manseed") and the division of the one inner wind into four, the boy lived in a world where nature, art, and human artifacts could be celebrated as one: "Green was the

singing house." By stanza 4, however, the "crying thigh" and "the voice that . . . / Itched" for a woman complete the fall. The last four stanzas (the final two of which Thomas rightly cut from the 18 Poems version as diggressive and anti-climactic) describe the boy's development into a poet as his defense against the fall into multiplicity. Punning on the Latin grammatical term, Thomas links the "fall" of the child with the balancing development of the poet's poems to reunite image and idea, the feeling of flesh and rejuvenating poetry:

> And from the first declension of the flesh
> I learnt man's tongue, to twist the shape of thoughts
> Into the stony idiom of the brain.

The poet's words are his clothes -- "the patch of words" that he may "knit," his patrimony from "the dead" who lie in a "moonless acre," death being a failure of the moon-imagination. The poet's words are organic as well, spoken by the "root of tongues" though the tongues of the dead are silent. Asserting the primacy of his imagination over the world, the poet speaks "the verbs of will." His "secret" is that words link inner and outer realities, tapping out like a telegraph operator the "code of night" which is both the images that well up from the unconscious mind within and the constellar patterns of the stars that encode the night without. The "code of night" recalls a similar evocation of the creative power of the word in "In the beginning" where the word "flowed up" and "from the solid bases of the light / Abstracted all the letters of the void" (letters = stars in the "code of night"). This code shows the poet that "what had been one was many sounding minded." Although most critics read this to mean that a knowledge of language caused the poet to discover greater division in the world, it may well mean that the poet discovered the crucial secret of the Romantic polysemous metaphor that can weave a seamless continuity between

inner and outer worlds. That poetic language is a unifying power seems clear from stanza 7, the final stanza in the 18 Poems version. There, the action of the previous six stanzas is summed up: the poet's progress from "one womb, one mind" to the "divorcing sky" and "million minds" at childhood's end to the young poet's discovery that imagination and poetic language could restore lost unity and bring again "one sun, one manna, warmed and fed." Martin Dodsworth notes that the union here of outer sun and inner (to be eaten) manna as two kinds of warmings reinforces the self/world identity the achievement of which is the central task of imagination in these poems.[18] In the notebook version, two stanzas of doubt follow the climactic return to one sun and manna. The adolescent poet cannot seek unity through love, only through masturbation ("the nervous hand rehearsing on the thigh / Acts with a woman"). The "one sun" he sees remains a "cipher" (zero), and he wonders how the relationship-seeking poet, the biological product of love's fever, can unite with the immobile, non-biological ("soldered") world of "stone" and "brass." A dark and difficult question that makes one recall that Romantic metaphors for imagination are often organic, it is probably just as well that Thomas dropped the stanzas. In any case, "From love's first fever" is a clear example of the Romantic myth worked out in a spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet, a type fully realized in the August Notebook and its demanding offspring, the Altarwise sonnets.

There remain to be examined more briefly poems that deal with the problem of self and world but which do not fit as clearly into the phases of the Romantic myth as the poems just discussed. In some of these poems, Thomas is still fascinated with the idea that the identity of self and world means that the poet's imagination is, as Coleridge

says, of the same kind if not degree as God's. In Poem Twenty (N 246-47), "Through these lashed rings," Thomas sets up a series of inner/outer identities or relationships: eye/globe, body-island/heaven-sea, world/word. In fact, God seems dependent on the poet for the completion of the miracle of creation. God and Thomas are equal partners:

> Inside this mouth I feel his message moving
> Acquainting me with my divinity;
> As through these ears he harks my fire burn
> His ghostly heart into some symmetry.

Defining heaven as simply the "unending sea around my measured isle," Thomas must see God, in this poem, as the spiritualizing energy in nature whose priest the poet is. A better poem on the same idea is Poem Thirty-Six (N 263-64), "Foster the light." Emphasizing awkwardly the word "nor" to mean "yet do not" as in "Do you not father me," the poet sets up four stanzas of images of identification between the body and the cosmos. As usual in Thomas, the virtue of such a poem is not in its simple idea that the poet explores over and over, but rather in the power of the images to evoke the sense of identity with the world through the image. The best images of this sort are in stanza 1:

> Master the night, nor spire the starry spines,
> Nor muster worlds that spin not through the skin
> But know the clays that burrow round the stars.

As in Poem Twenty, the poet concludes in the last stanza that just as the poet has reached out in his images to identify with the cosmos, so the God of that cosmos should reciprocate by directing that cosmos towards an identity with the poet:

> Set thou / God / thy clouds and daylights on my lips,
> Give me thy tempers and thy tides as I
> Have given flesh unto the sea and moon.

Thomas's belief in the power of the poet's words to reciprocate with God's in creating an identity of self and world is further evidenced in several

poems as the redeeming or shaping power of language. Poem Eight (N 233-34) describes, in the image of the correspondent breeze, the arising to action of imagination whose words can "translate" nature:

> We see rise the secret wind behind the brain
> . . . . . .
> The code of stars translate in heaven.

Poem Twenty-Five (N 252), "The almanac of time," argues that time is a unique function of man -- time's "almanac" is hung in the brain, an "inward sun" counts the seasons, each bone is a "chapter" each of whose words is "time." Yet language itself prophesies man's redemption out of time: "The syllables be said and said again: / Time shall belong to man." Could orthodox Christianity and its Word bring about man's redemption, the poet would join the church. Stated thus conditionally (with the implied answer that, no, the church cannot do so), this proposition is the subject of Poem Four (N 227-28), "That the sum sanity might add to nought." An attack on rationalism as its title suggests, the poem says that the poet would gladly "be woven at the Sabbath loom" if only the church might bring it to pass "that earth might reel upon its block of reason." Linking words and things in sacramental ritual, the morning sun would actually become a "fanatic image," but Thomas clearly implies by leaving the conditional statement unqualified by an answer that only the poet could possibly do this. A striking example of the power of language to alter the external world is Poem One (N 225), "The hand that signed the paper." Apparently a thirties political poem about a king who signs a document that leads to the fall of a city, and with overtures of the fate of Jericho, the poem's almost exclusive interest in the ability of mere words to change the outer world make this an example of what, as a poet, Thomas longed for his poetic language to be able to do. Not so far commented upon by the critics,

the fifth stanza here which was omitted in Twenty-Five Poems bears out this reading. Taken at face value, stanza 1 simply describes the fact that the act of writing "felled a city," the writer's fingers being "sovereign," "five kings" of the writer's microcosmic kingdom. Again, stanza 2 seems applicable to any writer, describing the familiar ailment of scribblers -- writer's cramp (l. 6). Stanza 3 obliquely suggests that the hand belongs to an earthly king or even God whose "treaty" (with Noah?) is broken when he sends "fever," "famine," and "locusts" (to the Egyptians?). Whether those of poet, conquerer, or God, hands "have no tears to flow." In stanza 5, however, Thomas comes closest to untangling the poem as a near-allegory and to saying that he is describing one property of imagination -- its ability to break up the picture the poet receives of the outer world in order to then reshape it. The city under seige in this poem is, we are told, in fact the world:

> These five blind kings /fingers/ have quills for scepters;
> Each has a parchment for his shield,
> Debates with vizier words what time he shatters
> The four walls of the world.

Omitted from the Twenty-Five Poems version, this stanza in the notebook clearly enlarges the scope of the poem beyond a typical thirties protest against rightist dictatorships and religious conservatism.

A final group of poems dealing with the relation of self and world includes the famous "process" poems: "The force that through the green fuse drive the flower" (Poem Twenty-Three, N 249-50) and "A process in the weather of the heart" (Poem Thirty-Five, N 262). Many critics have rightly noted that Thomas's most famous early poem, "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower," has as an important theme the idea that the process of growth and decay that exists in the external world also exists in the inner world of the poet's body. Each of the first three

five-line stanzas presents one and a half lines devoted to the process of inner and outer growth, one and a half lines devoted to the process of inner and outer decay, and two refrain-like lines that are the poet's commentary on the first three lines. Thus in stanza 1 a mechanistic nature ("force," "fuse," "blasts") of the "green fuse" parallels the poet's "green age"; in stanza 2, the stream of water parallels the poet's stream of blood; and in stanza 3 the whirlpool parallels the whirling earthen flesh ("quick sand"; quick = living, fleeting). What only a few commentators note, however, is that the final two lines of each stanza hold the key to the most crucial theme of the poem. For instance, in stanza 1: "And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose / My youth is bent with the same wintry fever." In stanza 2, the poet is likewise "dumb" to tell his veins that time sucks out their blood, and in stanza 3 he is "dumb" to tell the hanging criminal that the poet's own body is of the lime into which the hanged man's body will be thrown. Far from rejoicing in his unity with nature, the poet is all too aware that this oneness is a oneness of death; furthermore, as a poet, he is unable, in this poem, to use his poet's language as a means of establishing a deeper communion with nature (the rose), his own body (the veins), or another human being (the hanging man). In other words, this is really a poem about the limits of poetic language, the poet's feeling of self-consciousness that estranges him intellectually from the world. This concern for the terms of his relationship with nature as a Romantic problem is further evidenced by two echoes of earlier Romantic poets in stanza 1. As nearly every critic of this poem has noted, the "crooked rose" is an echo of Blake's "The Sick Rose." A cancelled version of this stanza (N 249) reveals this poem quite definitely as the source: we have the "eaten rose," the "crooked worm,"

and the "central storm," all images from Blake's poem on the corruption of nature and love. Less vivid but probably equally valid is the unnoticed echo of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" from whose "destroyer or perserver" Thomas probably got his word "destroyer" used in a somewhat similar poem on the poet's desire to unite nature's "force" with his own poetic powers. These probable allusions to poets who believed in the redeeming power of love are reinforced by stanza 4 whose deviating consonantal rhyme scheme and whose reversal of the growth/decay sequence of the paired one and a half of lines 1-3 of the first three stanzas to decay/growth signals the poet's effort to reverse the imprisoning cycles of generation. In stanza 4 a birth is described but in such generalized symbols that it could be a child, a poem, or the imagination itself. It is, in any case, the birth of the power of love in one or all of its forms. Significantly, the important refrain of this stanza was one of the few alternations made in the 18 Poems version of the poem, "And I am dumb to tell the timeless sun / How time is all" becoming "And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind / How time has ticked a heaven round the stars." The earlier version means simply that the poet cannot escape time as the sun seems to do. In the more elusively phrased revision, the poet uses two words -- "weather's wind" -- both of which he frequently employs to describe simultaneously present and correspondent inner and outer states. If he could use his poet's language to unite inner and outer weather and wind by communicating with both, he could solve the problem of his own physical imprisonment in but intellectual estrangement from fallen nature. He would, if he could, say that he knows how (= that and/or by what means) time has ticked a heaven round the stars. Using the image of a clock whose hands are time, whose numerals may be stars, and which, if it is one of those ornate grandfather's clocks, has a disc

on its crown that displays the heavenly bodies and that turns as the constellations move during the year, the poet seems to say that only by the psychological fall of the poet into self-conscious estrangement from nature could he discover the nature of redemption and the power of love, that, going beyond his own love-evoking language, redeems man. Time "ticks" the circle of eternity just as the clock's hands round its face. But even love is questioned in the refrain that closes the whole poem: "And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb / How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm." A polysemous metaphor, "sheet" and "worm" include the winding-sheet and the worms of the tomb, the bedsheet and the lover's phallus, and, importantly, the poet's sheet of paper and bent fingers that hold the pen. Unlike any previous stanza refrain, this refrain to the whole poem overcomes the poet's dumbness in telling, for by using the polysemous metaphor he causes death, love, and poetic imagination to become a single utterance (the final line) -- a partial, uncertain but real victory over the "process" that seems to dominate the poem. Both W. S. Merwin and Raymond Stephens note that Thomas wishes simultaneously to elementalize the self and to personalize nature in this poem (outer "force"/inner "emotion") to which one may add that the final stanza and final refrain add a more complex solution still.[19]

A grimmer "process" poem is Poem Thirty-Five (N 262), "A process in the weather of the heart." What distinguishes "A process . . ." from the more complex companion poem "The force . . ." is the absence of the sensibility of the poet-as-poet who seeks in love and his own words for some way to reshape his relationship with the outer world. Here the process is heavily weighted in favor of the forces of decay. Still, the desire of the poet to link inner self and outer world, even in deathliness, remains strong. In the first two stanzas the workings

of the inner world are described in images equally applicable to outer events. The heart has its own "weather," the veins their "quarter" like the moon, the blood its "suns" (cells), the womb and sperm being like sunbeams shining on a grave. All opposites prophesy one another and collapse endlessly into themselves: sight defines blindness to come, darkness is a kind of light for without it light could not be distinguished, and even insemination may lead either to life or death (miscarriage, etc.). This endless array of opposites, "the quick and the dead," both become unreal after such brooding, "two ghosts before the eye." In the last stanza, however, the poet switches from a description of the inner world in terms of the outer one. Now a "process" in the "weather" of the "world" replaces the process of the heart as the focus of attention. Here, too, each "mothered child" lives in the "double shade" of the two ghosts, life and death. The final three lines of the poem, in an attempt to conclude the succession of process images that have not advanced since stanza 1 except for a brief inversion of the self/world analogy at the first of this final stanza, envision a final apocalypse in which the great eyes of the sky (sun/moon) collapse as the dead man's eyes are closed like curtained windows. At that extreme point "the heart gives up its dead," gives up the ghost or ghosts of the opposites. But this final resolution is the external torpor of oblivion and there is no hint that the poet's imagination can do a thing to affect the process or its end.

Two final groups of poems from the August Notebook remain to be examined. These are those poems that comment on the poet's understanding of nature and those that deal with the various forms of love. As the previous discussion of the Romantic myth and the self/world poems dealt in great part with nature, only a brief recapitulation is needed for the

SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONS: THE ROMANTIC VERSION OF AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND ITS TRANSFORMATION IN THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

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most part. However, one important poem on nature as sacrament not so far discussed should be examined: Poem Thirty-Three, "This bread I break."

So far it has been shown that Thomas's main departure in the August Notebook is a new concern for the relation of self and world in terms of the phases of the Romantic myth. Striving to find images simultaneously descriptive of inner and outer states, the poet moves further to a concern with the terms of the self/world identity, the desire to use his own poetic powers to regenerate nature and to regain the lost unity which he associates with childhood or even pre-natal or pre-conceptual existence. As each poem seems an "experiment" aimed at this end, the range of responses is wide. Dark process poems like "A process in the weather of the heart" offer less hope than poems like "A force . . ." where the estranged poet is at least aware of the possibility that love, poetic language, and that language's power to construct polysemous metaphors fusing love, death, and poetry into one could be used to alter one's perception of a world of endless cyclicity. Other poems like "Before I knocked" look on nature in a Manichean way, seeing division into good and evil that cannot be resolved. In poems like "In the beginning" unfallen nature and the Word are evoked not only as a vision of the past but as a sign that the poet is exercising his own creative word that may restore nature to its unfallen form in his perception of it. Finally, in a poem like "Shiloh's seed," at least in a few lines, one sees a direct influence of Blake (the Southcott epigram) and a corresponding desire to see nature as sacramental -- "every blade the lamb." This sacramentalism, which plays an even larger role in the later poems, appears here in the astonishingly clear poem, "This bread I break" (N 260-61, Poem Thirty-Three). That Thomas considered this poem significant is

born out by his comment recorded by Donald Hall that his three favorite poems of his own work were "This bread I break," "Poem in October," and "Poem on his birthday," three poems whose shared theme is the spiritual significance or joy found by the poet in nature.[20] Originally entitled "Breakfast before execution," and composed on Christmas Eve, the poem could well have as its speaker a condemned criminal, Christ, or, as usual, the poet-as-Christ. The poem's bread or oat and wine or grape may be simultaneously a description of the Eucharist, the sacramental nature of Romantic poets, the sacramental nature of love (sexual love, st. 3), and the holy activity of poetic creation with the poet as celebrant. Tindall, it seems to me, leans too heavily on poetic creation as the central strand of meaning (RG 86f.) as Rushworth Kidder in his Christian reading leans too heavily on the poem's nearness to orthodoxy.[21] By carefully excluding from the poem its original title and any word uniquely associated with the specifically Christian ritual of the Eucharist, Thomas is able to displace the aura, the ambiance of sentiment that the Christian reader may retain from the mass into a secular context. Thomas is a master of this technique, neither excluding nor rejecting Christian rites and concepts, but leaving the poem open enough to "receive" them without limiting its range of suggestiveness to them. Tindall is right to see religion, nature, and poetry as simultaneous themes, to which one would wish to add Derek Stanford's reading of stanza 4 as a description of sexual love as a celebratory rite as well.[22] In stanzas 1 and 2, however, the emphasized theme is that of nature as sacrament. In order to celebrate this pantheistic rite, man must "break" (cut in two/let loose) the oat and grape, must sever them from soil and vine to make the bread and wine which are consumed in this Romantic mass. If this ritual is valid, Thomas seems

to hope, then he has found the long-sought answer to the problem of deathliness in nature: the death of all things is a sacramental rite, it _is_ the death of Christ, for all things _are_ Christ (just as in the frequent "birth" poems every child is Christ). Thus the last two lines of the first two stanzas do not, as Moynihan supposes, attack the Christian Eucharist as evil because its enactment requires the death of a part of nature -- oat and grape; rather, these lines say that self ("man") and world (crops, grapes, sun, wind) are united in an outbreak of joy ("man . . . / . . . broke the grape's joy") that requires a death before redemption can occur.[23] The description in stanza 2 of the grape as "flesh" of the vine links the idea of the crucifixion of Christ in stanza 1 ("this wine upon a foreign tree") with the idea of sexual love (secondarily, poetic composition) of stanza 3 (_18 Poems_ version):

> This flesh you break, this blood you let
> . . . . . .
> Were oat and grape,
> Born of the sensual root and sap;
> My wine you drink, my bread you snap.
> (_P_ 86)

A rejected draft of the final line -- "God's bread you break, you draw the cup" -- reinforces the idea that Thomas may have begun with a "Christian" poem and then carefully extended its range of reference by suppressing explicitly Christian allusions (_N_ 331). By doing so, he transfers the idea of the crucifixion and its celebration in the Eucharist from Christ's unique, sacrificial act of love that saved man to the poet as self-redeemer by virtue of his role as celebrator of a spiritualized nature, sexual love, and poetic creation. Although he did not fully realize it until the writing of the celebratory war poems and post-war celebrations of childhood and the particularized Welsh landscapes, as

early as December of 1933 in "This bread I break" Thomas had formulated a large part of his final strategy for survival as a Romantic poet: the adoption of the more Wordsworthian role of the poet as nature's priest, celebrating all her transformations of birth, death, and rebirth as sacraments of the great phases of creation, fall, and redemption, paralleled by the poet's own sacramental craft of the making of images that link these outward natural sacraments to corresponding events in the poet's own mind. But those who seem to believe that this strategy for survival ended in triumph or that the poet did not as often as not despair of his ability to foster a healing love by the act of sacramentalizing have failed to account fully for some of the darker of the later poems.[24] Even in the August Notebook the poems on love are deeply divided as to love's efficacy as a division-healing power. With a brief look at these poems, then, the discussion of the August Notebook will close.

One of the most striking features of the August Notebook in comparison to the February Notebook is the revival of the idea of love as a healing power. Poems in despair of love still appear but they are balanced by others that make large claims for love's efficacy in establishing a relationship between self and world, even of redeeming both nature and man. As in "This bread I break" in which Christ, nature, and the poet partake of a single, continuous sacrament, so in the very eery Poem Nine (N 234-36), a long series of quatrains of headless tetrameter lines that seem like witches' recipes, the newborn child suffers the crucifixion of birth as a love deity: "Slay me, slay the god of love; / God is slain in many ways." If crucifixion-birth involves the poet as love deity, so in creation of cosmos and poem, as in "In the beginning," an act of love is undergone. In the notebook version,

that poem's description of the Word's creation of images that are also things of the cosmos ends with an explanation of the motivation for both creations: "a secret heart rehearsed its love." Both God and poet, then, seek relationship and love in their similar creative activities. In the 18 Poems version, this last line is changed to read: "Blood shot and scattered to the winds of light / The ribbed original of love." God and the poet here create Adam ("ribbed original") as Universal Man. Similarly, as seen above, in "The force . . ." the fourth stanza posits love as the force that binds together with the poet's activity (in the poem's final couple, also an act of love) to overcome death and to explain eternity. Poem Thirty-One, "I fellowed sleep" (N 258-59), describes sleep itself as a lover who "kissed between the brains" and who opened the "latches" and "bolt" that separated the sleeping poet's inner darkness from the outer darkness of the night so that the inner and outer stars, moon, and "worlds" flow between one another at ease: "Where went but one grave-gabbing shade / Now go the stars." Love can be a resolver of opposites as well, as in Poem Sixteen (N 241-42) where the poet exhorts his lover to "lift your mask" so that their essential selves may unite. The lover is exhorted not to love the poet with pity, simple idealism, or simple lust but to love in such a way that her love includes the various possible opposites -- death, hate, fear (st. 4). A very beautiful but not yet reprinted poem on love is Poem Thirty-Four (N 261), "Your pain shall be a music." Using a six-line stanza with consonantal and full rhymes (aabccb) with a syllable count of 10/10/4/4/4, Thomas writes an exquisite song, sung by a mother to her unborn child telling the child how its pain will be part of the love forever binding them together:

> Your pain shall be a music
> O my undone
> Flesh and bone
> Surrounding me.

Worthy of Campion, this poem anticipates the later, better known poem on the same subject, "A saint about to fall" (P 141-42). From material love one may leap to necrophilia, one of Thomas's more private concerns, that essentially ends in the notebooks but does reappear in the late poem "In the white giant's thigh." Here, we have Poem Twenty-Eight (N 254-55) "Here lies the worm of man," a powerfully eery speech delivered by "the dead man" who eats lovingly another body, flowers, and ghost called the "worm of man':

> Here lies the worm of man and here I feast,
> The dead man said
> . . . . . .
> And silently I milk the buried flowers.
> Here drops a silent honey in my shroud,
> Here goes the ghost who made of my pale bed
> The heaven's house.

Another necrophilic poem is Poem Thirty-Two (N 259-60), "See, says the lime," in which the lime speaks of its reception of the hanged man's body which it devours lovingly. Working its way through the veins and blood, the lime is like a lover:

> See, says the lime, my wicked milks
> I put round ribs that packed their heart
> . . . . . .
> On these blue lips . . .
> The wind of kisses sealed a pact.

One form of love that does nothing to bring relationship is masturbation. Poems Twenty-Six and Forty-One both describe this act as a "rehearsing" of the love act that the poet as an older man will experience. The well-known "I see the boys of summer" (Poem Thirty-Nine, N 267-69) also describes masturbation as a spending of love fruitlessly: "I see the boys of summer / Lay the gold tithings barren" (cf. "golden shot" in "A process in the weather of the heart" for a similar image of male seed). The most complex poem on masturbation, however, is Poem Thirteen, "My hero bares his nerves" (N 239-40).

Critics who wish to make Thomas a "mystic" or a Christian, like Korg and Kidder, ignore the obvious theme of masturbation in "My hero" while a debunking critic like Holbrook can see nothing else but masturbation as theme.[25] The "hero" of the poem has been variously identified as the poet himself, his hand, his penis, or any combination of these. I agree with Tindall that more of the other images of the poem can be explained by reading "hero" as "hand" than as penis, but hand is synecdoche for two "processes" that are simultaneously developed in the poem: (1) adolescent masturbation and (2) adolescent poetry. What binds these two themes together as one is love, which ought to unite the poet with his lover and his poem with the world. However, both adolescent varieties of love -- masturbation and equally self-turned poetry -- are seen as narcissistic, incapable of uniting the self and the world as love ought to do. Stanza 2 explicitly links love and poetic composition:

> And these poor nerves so wired to the skull
> Ache on the lovelorn paper
> I hug to love with my unruly scrawl
> That utters all love-hunger
> And tells the page the empty ill.

Though hero-hand that shapes the poem "rules" the body whose spine is a "mortal ruler," the hand is an "unruly" when it composes solipsistic poems as when it cause ejaculation. One recalls Thomas's metaphor for his poetic images as "seeds" (SL 191) and his fear of "ingrowing" (SL 171) as a poet. Stanza 3 describes Thomas's method of composition in traditional Romantic terms: It is an expressivist act releasing love into the outer world:

> My hero bares my side and sees his heart
> Tred like a naked Venus
> The beach of flesh

but this Venus/heart who winds her hair/muscles' "blood-red plait," though exposed, remains attached to the skin, just as masturbation is

"stripping my loin of promise." In stanza 4, both in masturbating and in composing solipsistic poems, the poet fails to redeem himself from the "mortal error" of self-consciousness, which such sex and poetry feed, and thus fails to satisfy the "hunger's emperor" (penis/poet-as-Christ) who could resolve the cycles of "birth and death" seen as "two . . . thieves" beside the emperor. The striking final line describes the manner of flushing older European toilets: "He pulls the chain the cistern moves." Both the enervated aftermath of masturbation and of narcissistic poetry, as well as an obvious description of defecation, the line is the poet's severe chastisement of himself for engaging in activities that aggravate the problem of the self's isolation from the world. The only adequate analysis of this poem is the one by Raymond Stephens. Stephens says: "The 'hero' is the young poet's total consciousness of their /hand/penis/creative faculty/ interconnection with himself, a consciousness which is fully self-aware. The poem is thus a critical satire organized and conducted by the emergent primary self, the emergent poetic identity, on the secondary self which has 'immature' pretensions to love and poetry. To claim that it offers an uncritical indulgence is to miss the point . . . The whole poem is a remarkably mature acknowledgement of immaturity."[26]

A final group of poems that strike a more positive attitude toward love are Poem Thirty-Nine (N 267-69), "I see the boys of summer," Poem Thirty-Seven (N 264-67), "The shades of girls" /"Our eunuch dreams"/, and Poem Forty-One (N 270-72), "If I was (18 Poems: were) tickled by the rub of love." Three of the last five poems in the August Notebook, these poems indicate a surge of interest in love following Poem Thirty-Three, "This bread I break," which introduced the important linkage between nature, love, and poetry as Eucharistic sacraments.

"I see the boys of summer," which Thomas chose to open 18 Poems, has been analyzed more often than any other of his poems save Altarwise and "Fern Hill." There is a general consensus on the following: section 1 (st. 1-4) is spoken by the poet, section 2 by the boys (st. 5-8), and section 3 (st. 9) by either (a) a chorus of the poet and the boys, (b) by the poet and the boys in dialogue, or (c) by the poet quoting the boys and replying to them in the odd-numbered lines. The central theme of the poem is the power of sexual love to overcome death and, as in "My hero," the boys' isolation. Section 1, spoken by the older poet with the voice of experience, argues that masturbation wastes love that should be bestowed on women (st. 1), that such Onanism prevents pregnancy (st. 2, prophesied by the "signal moon" that marks the months), that the boys' own births were a fall (st. 3), and that the boys shall age into impotent old men, possibly defenders of sexually repressive social codes (SP 103). Section 2, a reply to the poet by the boys (except for the last line of stanza 8 which the poet speaks) argues that sexual love is man's weapon against death (st. 1)

> But seasons must be challenged or they totter
> Into a chiming quarter
> Where, punctual as death, we ring the stars

that sexual denial (by Onanism, sexual repression) leads only to death -- "the bright-eyed worm" or the "man of straw" -- that the boys' sexual potency is capable of bringing fruition to the whole world (st. 3) --

> We summer boys . . .
> . . . . . .
> Hold up the noisy sea and drop her birds

-- yet that this very action only populates the world with that many more candidates for death (st. 7 and st. 8, ll. 1-5) as the boys' sexual potency is diverted by age, Onanism, or possibly homosexuality ("here breaks a kiss in no love's quarry"). The final line of section 2 -- "oh

see the poles of promise in the boys" balances the final line of stanza 1 -- "Oh see the poles of summer in the ice," the two exclamations being reactions to sexual decay and fruition. Sections 1 and 2, however, are essentially a roisterous catalogue of images of birth and death, potency and impotency, fertility and sterility, divided between two speakers: the poet (section 1) who tends to emphasize the boys' ignorance of the limitations of love, and the chorus of the boys (section 2) who, although recognizing also the presence of these limitations, tend both to ascribe any feelings of love to their own willfully asserted adolescent perverseness and also to emphasize love's power against the challengeable "seasons." If one purpose of Romantic poetry is to unite the opposites, then section 3 (st. 9) may be read as the resolution of a psychodrama with the speakers of sections 1 and 2 as the spokesmen for the negatives and positives of various opposites. If Davies (SP 102) and Stephens are right in saying that section 3 is not a true dialogue but an imagined dialogue both sides of which are actually spoken by the poet, then section 3 (its one stanza signifying its unity) represents the poet's ability to fuse opposition into unity.[27] This unity is only realized in the poem's final, enigmatic, often-analyzed line: "Oh see the poles are kissing as they cross." The significance of this line, however many meanings one can find in it, is first of all that the poet has been able to create this reconciling image that unites the similar images of the final lines of sections 1 and 2, and that he has been able to unite the two sides of his opposites-finding mind as well as to unite the actions of the human self (the boys) and the cosmos (the "poles" in one reading of the line). In other words, Thomas has presented the Romantic image in the poem's final line. The line may contain the following meanings: (1) adolescent homosexuality as sterile (Stanford), (2) a mystical union of all

things (Korg), (3) the crossing of the North and South poles (Olson), (4) the sign of the cross made by crossing penises (Tindall), (5) the crossing polar opposites of womb and penis during intercourse (Davies SP 103), or (6) crossed penises as the crossed swords of the knights of eros preparing to do battle against the dragon death and all his legions of decay.[28] In addition, Vincent Leitch has discovered that Thomas, a great lover of George Herbert, may well have taken the image of kissing poles from Herbert's poem "The Search":

> Thy will such a strange distance is
> As that to it
> East and West touch, the poles do kisse,
> And parallels meet.[29]

Leitch believes that Thomas means by the lifted image simply that the forms of growth and decay are balanced dialectically. However, one may add to his discovery that since Thomas knew Herbert's poetry well he would have known that Herbert, like Donne, plays with the idea that Adam's tree and Christ's cross are said to have stood on the same place. Thus, in addition to all else, Thomas could be saying that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and Christ's cross may become one, not in a Christian context but in the context of the simultaneous image of crossed penises as emblematic of the Romantic sacrament of sexual love. And if all this is not enough, one may turn to Thomas's short story "A Prospect of the Sea" and find, in the passage describing the poet's ascent to discover an "undrowned" Eden made up of words-as-things, the following: "he stood on a slope no wider than the loving room of the world, and the two poles kissed behind his shoulders" (PS 9). Now unless "loving room" is a pun for womb, Thomas, at least in this story, uses kissing poles as Herbert does to represent the opposite ends of the world, which, in the poem, are also the appendages of the self of each

boy of summer. Laden with all its meanings, the image of the kissing poles seems first and foremost a Romantic image of redemption by love, itself a kind of crucifixion, crucial evidence of the poet's ability to resolve the opposites of stanzas 1 and 2 into a unity by the exercise of the image-making faculty, imagination.

Another threat to love as a redeeming power is the illusion of love. Poem Thirty-Seven (later entitled "Our eunuch dreams"; N 264-66; P 89-90) addresses the problem of seduction by false images of love that prevents the development of "true" love as a power capable of moving and changing the outer world. Although somewhat obscure in a few of its images, the poem's main line of development is easier to follow than in some other of Thomas's opaque notebook poems. Divided into four sections of two stanzas each, the poem presents the following argument (the superior stanza-ordering of the 18 Poems version is followed here for clarity; the ideas are the same). In section 1 (st. 1-2), the poet deplores "our eunuch dreams" of imaginary lovers for such dreams are "seedless," lacking the "love and light" of real love, being the inciting images of masturbation ("whack their boys' limbs"), providing only the death-like lovers of the mind ("widows of the night"), a kind of necrophilia of the images of the subconscious. Sunlight causes these images to fade (st. 2). In section 2 (st. 3-4), another kind of illusory love is rejected: the images of movie stars on the screen, "the gunman and his moll." Like the eunuch dreams, these film images are "midnight nothings" that "give love the lie" and then retreat into the can of the film. Section 3 (st. 5-6) asks the question Keats asked in the last stanza of the Nightingale Ode: "Which is the world? Of our two sleepings which / Shall fall awake . . . ?" Critics interpret these lines to mean either the two illusory forms of love, eunuch dreams and love films, or else the

world of sleeping (dreams/films) and the world of waking (the subject of stanza 4). At first, would guess the former explication but the rest of stanza 5 and all of stanza 6 suggest the latter. Stanza 5 obliquely suggests that a revolution is coming, maybe a communist one ("red-eyed"), to overturn the "Welshing rich," the "sunny gentlemen" of a class society, and certain obscure fears, "the night-geared." Stanza 6 explains why neither eunuch dreams (st. 3-4) nor love films (st. 1-2) have the power to carry out the revolution: the first is too biased an account of love in a hopelessly ideal form ("one sided," like a filmstrip), while the second destroys the dreamer's "faith" in real love. Section 4, in any case, answers the question "which is the world" by saying "this (waking/ reality) is the world . . . Have faith." As usual, "faith" is a code word for an imaginative assertion of one's desire that changes the outer world. In the outer world, the images of the film are replaced by fleshly "strips of stuff" while eunuch dreams are replaced by the dreams of those who "move/Loving." Such love dreams can redeem the dead: "The dream that kicks the buried from their sack." The Shelleyan revolutionaries of love, we can drive away the "old dead" images of eunuch dreams and "smack / The image from the plate" of lying love films. Thus, after the battle, the survivors shall redeem the world with love: "And who remain shall flower as they love, / Praise to our faring hearts."

The last poem in the August Notebook to be considered here is the last entered of all the notebook poems, Poem Forty-One, "If I was tickled by the rub of love" (N 270-72); "was" = "were" in 18 Poems). Although it is probably just chance that this poem ends the fourth of the extraordinary notebooks that document a young poet's emergence as a significant talent, "If I were tickled" is distinguished by being the only one of several autobiographical notebook poems that combine their

forms of the spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet with the theme of love as a redemptive agent. In fact, one may go so far as to say that this poem associates love with "comedy" in the strict sense of the term: a desire to believe in the ultimate restoration of all discordances as in Dante's Divine Comedy. Critics have isolated certain themes in the poem that, though present, seem to me secondary: the desire of the more mature young adult to make an "adjustment to reality" (Tindall RG 46) or to protest religious and social restrictions or adolescent expressions of sexuality (Walford Davies).[30] Even Elder Olson's astute remark about this poem could be seen as a dramatic monologue spoken by a "modern Hamlet" does not go far enough, for Thomas clearly defines his "choice" in the final two lines of the poem.[31] Certainly Thomas is saying, in each of the first four stanzas, that if condition A should hold, then condition B would be of no consequence to him. Thomas wants to believe in the efficacy of love, but he refuses to overlook the impediments to love or love's own failings even as he puts his ultimate trust therein. That which he wishes to believe is that he could be "tickled by the rub of love." Full of meanings, "rub" could be friction, impediment, roughness, annoyance, repulsion, while "tickled" could be friction or amusement (RG 46). But why tickled? Because tickling leads to laughter, laughter is our response to comedy, and if the tickle is caused by love, then Thomas is clearly hoping that he can find a way to make love a redemptive power just as laughter in comedy may indicate our response to its final restoration. Actually, "tickled," meaning "satisfyingly amused" is probably a better word than "laughter"; anyway, he describes our response to comedy. The poem looks years ahead to an actual love comedy that Thomas wrote, Under Milk Wood. In the poem, the proposition "if I were tickled by the rub of love" is counterbalanced in stanzas 1-4

by a description of the poet's progress through his own love autobiography: (1) conception by his parents, (2) gestation and birth, (3) childhood and adolescence, and (4) manhood and old age. In each stanza, the poet is saying that if love could be shown to be a restorative power he would not fear any of its attendant drawbacks or downright evils. These failings include: in stanza 1, the mother's luring of the father into impregnating her, the shock of umbilical severance at birth, the bloody mess of the birth act, and the religious guilt about sex imposed on parents and offspring (the apple and the flood -- Noah's); in stanza 2, biological determinism of sex, childhood's brevity, and legal restrictions upon or military perversions of repressed sexual energy (gallows/axe/crossed sticks of war); in stanza 3, guilt over adolescent masturbation and a new awareness of death; and in stanza 4, inevitable impotence in age and the bourgeoisie channeling of love into the joys of the "sweethearting crib." Having completed this survey of the ages of man in love, Thomas, in stanza 5, sums up the cycles in the figure of the girl whose exotic nature is a "drug" and the old man with fallen shank. The final "rub" is death, the worm beneath the nail, love in its darkest form -- necrophilia. Stanza 5 thus sums up stanzas 1-4. Stanzas 6-7 form two responses to stanza five's gloomy conclusion that love is death. The response of stanza 6 is one of gloom. Deftly summing up the progress of the poet from foetus ("Knobbly ape") to birth ("noose's twist") to mother's love, erotic love, and the necrophilic love of death in the six-foot deep grave ("his six / Feet in the <u>rubbing</u> dust"), the poet tells us that love is death. His assertion that love fails to "raise the midnight of a chuckle" means not only that he fails to cause the "least little bit" of a chuckle but that the purpose of a chuckle (restoring love) is to obliterate the dark. Stanza 7, the last, is a

further response to the conclusion of stanza 5. In the first line "rub" seems to mean "reality," as Tindall argues (RG 48), so that the poet is asking the final question: what is reality? A series of questions suggests that reality is a mixture of love and death. Death's feather tickles the "nerve" (the love nerve, the penis); the poet's lover is a femme fatale ("the thistle in the kiss"); and the poet-as-Christ is, himself (as well as penis) a creature of love who endures death ("My Jack of Christ born thorny on the tree"). Although the "words of death" (words and things are always one in Thomas's crucial moments of struggle) overcome the poet-as-Christ, his "wordy wounds" are "printed" with the hair of his lover (who, pressing her head for a long time on his wounds leaves the imprint of hair?) as if to say that poetry is a Christ-like act of "publishing" love. The last two lines leave no doubt that the "modern Hamlet" has decided on the nature of his desperate attack on death: "I would be tickled by the rub that is: / Man be my metaphor." As we have seen in so many poems from the juvenilia through the four notebooks, Thomas's line of development has been consistent with the statements in the letters that the reconciliation of inner and outer world by the imaginative identification of microcosmic man and macrocosmic universe to form (he hopes) a Universal Man is his ultimate goal. But Thomas the Christ, whose "wordy wounds" are a Romantic displacement of Christ's sacrificial blood into a secular variety of redemptive love, has never averted his face from the realities of death, time, narcissism, evil, and the limitations of love itself. Still, it is the "rub of love" that must fuse man with the cosmos. Thomas's great attempt to embody that action is Altarwise by Owl-light. There, his assertion "man be my metaphor" is grimly balanced by another fact that must be faced: "Death is all metaphors" (P 117). The poem "If I were tickled by the rub of love" points out the only course of action: to accept the Romantic displace-

ment of the role of Christ and his redeeming love that conquers death onto the poet whose reconciling imagination and whose own self-sacrifice may release that very love. But before closing this chapter with an examination of Altarwise by Owl-light, it is necessary to review a number of poems, leading up to the Altarwise sequence, that Thomas composed, or radically revised from the Notebooks during 1934-36, the two years between the completion of the Notebooks and the completion of the Altarwise sonnets.

Poems of 1934-36. With only two exceptions (P 83-85, 137-38), all of the poems in this group appeared, along with poems substantially identical to their notebook versions, in Thomas's first two volumes. Thus, these poems may be seen as attempting to perform two functions: (1) to advance on the notebook poems and (2) to complement these poems in the first two volumes. Since my purpose is a chronological survey of the poetry, I will emphasize the first function, keeping in mind that these poems lead up the Altarwise sonnets that Thomas himself admitted were the ultimate possible extension of the themes that had obsessed him as a poet from the first.

Of the poems of 1934-36, three are directly concerned with the nature of the poetic process. One of these, "Especially when the October wind" (P 98-99), was examined in its earlier form as one of the 1932-33 typescript poems from a "lost" notebook of that period. In its revised form, this poem shifts its emphasis from an almost total despair over the poet's "arid syllables," "the chain of words" (N 247), the untransformable Eliotic cityscape of wandering people and blowing newspapers, and an irreducible middle-class respectability to a greater sense of the poet's powers of imaginative empathy with both words and nature that tend to fuse into one another. In the new version, stanza 1

drops its picture of the youth wasting his prowess in time and the inefficaciousness of poetic composition for a picture of the identity between internal poetic process and the outer processes of nature. Outer landscape seems to dominate inner landscape as the October wind "punishes" the poet's hair in a violent version of the correspondent breeze that inspires inner creative powers. The sun is "crabbing" for its rays that strike the beach-walking poet causing a "shadow crab" of the poet's moving silhouette to be cast on the ground. The coughing raven in the leafless "winter sticks" also contributes to the poet's action of creation: "My busy heart who shudders as she talks / Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words." Certainly Romantic in his adherence here to an expressivist theory of poetry as the shedding of the heart's blood, the poet also takes upon himself Christ's shed blood and the external process of the "shedding" of leaves from the autumn trees. If words and things are one within the poet's own body ("syllabic blood"), so in stanza 2 are external phenomena not only physical but linguistic entities. Linking obesity and verbosity, he sees the "wordy shapes of women" who are "walking like the trees," two phrases that fuse nature, language, and man into a single perception. Even the trees, a geographical region, and the sea are an admixture of language and physicality: "the vowelled beeches," "the oaken voice," "a thorny shire /of/ . . . notes," and "the water's speeches." Far from showing exasperation with language's intrusion between the poet and a primal, pre-linguistic identity with nature, as some critics argue, this poem, especially stanza 2, celebrates the poet's seer-like ability to read the book of nature for his readers (addressed here repeatedly as "you"). The "tower of words" that encloses the poet may be pencil, poem, body, or his parents' house, but it is <u>from the vantage point</u> of the tower that the poet enjoys his pro-

phetic vision of the "wordy" landscape. Stanza 3 contrasts two sorts of time: (1) time as a measurement of bourgeoisie industriousness and prudence (clock time), symbolized in the "pot of ferns" which is to the middle-class Welsh home what the aspidistra is to the English; and (2) time as a revelation of secret truths when construed by the poet from the "clock" of seasonal change in nature: "the meadow's signs" and "the signal grass that tells me all I know." What the poet knows is the coming of winter which corresponds to the sense of evacuation that follows poetic creation -- the "heartless words," i.e., shed from the now-wordless heart of stanza 4. The "spelling" heart can spell the "dark-vowelled birds," both words and birds being prophetic of the "coming fury" of winter and death. Yet even in these circumstances, the poet, like a true Welsh druid, offers to weave "autumnal spells" to bring alive the "voice" of the landscape: "the spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales." The only significant image of the poem that is not a fusion of language and physicality is presented in line 4 of stanza 2: "the star-gestured children in the park." Significant in its location of the poem in a specific landscape -- Cwmdonkin Park -- that corresponds to the poet's inner state in the process of poetic creation, this image is also crucial to an understanding of the importance of language as a means of uniting man and nature. Playing in their Eden-like park, children have no need of language to unite them with nature for their estrangement is negligible compared to that of the adolescent poet who speaks the poem. The children are "star-gestured" because their outstretched hands make a star-like figure but more importantly because they are linked with the stars as symbols of nature's ancient unfallen order and possibly too because they do not distinguish words from things or stars from themselves so that they may "gesture" with a

star as well as a word. After the fall into self-consciousness, however, the children, like the poet, must work with language to heal the breech whose presence their very acquisition of linguistic sophistication symbolizes. Richard Werry's undeveloped remark that this poem recalls Keats's "To Autumn" in its drive to establish a single ontology for language and experience is helpful in placing "Especially when the October wind" in its proper tradition.[32]

A more complex poem on poetics from this same period is "Today, this insect" (P 124-25), a radical revision of Poem II (N 103-04) in the 1930-32 Notebook. The theme of this poem is the power of the poet to transform the outer world by detecting even in the life of an insect the creation / fall/redemption pattern that the poet-as-Christ fulfills in the making of his mythic poems, a sacrificial act related to the shedding of "syllabic blood" in the previous poem. Here, the poet begins with an explicit statement that shows his conscious awareness of his functions as a Romantic poet concerned with the relation of self and world: "Today, this insect, and the world I breathe, / Now that my syllables have outelbowed space." Truly "a singing Walt" (P 156) as he designates himself in a later poem, the poet is the governor of his relationship with the external world which he breathes in and out as Universal Man and which he shapes ("outelbows") by means of his imagination ("my symbols"). After this startingly affirmative opening, however, the poet backs up to tell us the difficulties that the poet faces in trying to transform the external world into the myths that make up the "fables" of poets. Simultaneously describing an insect which he has apparently just snapped in two ("We murder to dissect"!) and his own experiences of the Romantic myth, the poet seems to say that the emergence of the faculty of reason caused him to divide external perceptions ("sense") into "trust" and "tale." Although somewhat awkward, the punning parallel

of the divided poem's "trust and tale" and the just killed insect's "head and tail" seems to indicate that trust means the world as perceived by reason while tale means that world as perceived by the "fabulous" faculty, imagination. When such self-division occurs in a poem, it must occur in the poet; and if it occurs in the poet, then, by the terms of the Romantic myth, such psychic division constitutes a fall from the "Eden" of psychic unity. Such a fall is exactly what the poem- and insect-dividing poet experiences, the two halves of the insect being gory "witnesses to this / Murder of Eden and green genesis." The coda or refrain to stanza 1 has stymied Thomas's critics: "The insect certain is the plague of fables." Tindall guesses that "the insect certain" is either simply the insect or also the poem (RG 91). Probably "the insect certain" is the irreducible, untransformable scientific fact, rationally perceived. Thus, like a disease, it plagues the imagination that would transform (outelbow) reality by creating fables. What follows the victory of reason over imagination is the subject of the lines that follow. Like the Romantic child (or a poem) that grew from its embryo, the insect passed through several stages of development: its larval ("serpent caul"), pupal ("breaks his shell"), chrysalis ("a crocodile before the chrysalis"), and butterfly ("the flying heartbone") stages (see Emery, WDT 150-51). Both the poet's space-elbowing symbols and the butterfly are air-borne figures of unity of being. In somewhat murky syntax, the poet says that it is only the loss of one's faith in the power of love, a faith associated with the child and the poet's Eden fable ("this children's piece") that causes us to fall into division:

> Before the fall from love the flying heartbone,
> Winged like a sabbath ass this children's piece
> Uncredited / unbelieved / blows Jericho on Eden.

Reversing the coda to stanza 1, Thomas points to imagination as the way out of our fallen state: "The insect fable is the certain promise." In other words, the poet's ability to mythologize the insect in this very poem can rejuvenate in this poem of love the whole fallen world. This promise is borne out in the poem's final stanza. Beginning with a catalogue of fables or "fibs of vision" that "death" (reason or the "insect certain") has robbed of their ability to link outward reality with psychological or spiritual experience, the poet ends the poem with a short speech by "the ageless voice" or poet-Christ composite:

> 'Adam I love, my madman's love is endless,
> . . . . . .
> All legends' sweethearts on a tree of stories,
> My cross of tales behind the fabulous curtain.'

Loving "Adam" -- all men as well as the "Adamic" state of pre-fall unity -- the poet is crucified in the act of constructing his "stories" or "tales" that form a "fabulous curtain" -- a curtain of fables, a tapestry -- which itself contains the central idea of love ("all legends' sweethearts") that can restore man to the state that, as he says in stanza 2, man enjoyed "before the fall from love." An example of Thomas's displacement of the Christian concepts of the fall and Christ's regeneration by sacrificial love into the Romantic terms of a fall into psychic division, division between man and a rationally perceived nature, and redemption by the imaginative poet whose symbols create fables that transform the world, "Today, this insect" shows that Thomas was quite consciously aware that he was using Christian myth to articulate Romantic concerns.

A third and final poem from the 1934-36 group that bears importantly on Thomas's ideas about poetry is the mysterious "Should lanterns shine" (P 116). The first stanza describes the poet's inner quest for the female

other with whom union would bring the long-sought unity of being. Using as metaphor the archaeologist's probing of the innermost chambers of an ancient pyramid, the poet warns against seeking "the holy face" by the "unaccustomed light" of the "false day" of pure reason. This probing by pure reason, as Stephens points out in his analysis, is a betrayal by the "boy of love" whose desired female figure becomes under analysis an image of death: "And from her lips the faded pigments fall, / The mummy cloths expose an ancient breast." Thus, would the "holy face" give way to necrophilia if the boy "fell from grace" into rationality. In stanza 2, however, the poet, now older than the "boy of love" of stanza 1, complains of psychic division. Unlike Wordsworth who in "Tintern Abbey" spoke of joys in nature apprehended in the blood, heart, and purer mind of the poet as boy, youth, and man, Thomas complains that neither "pulse" "heart," nor "head" can "reason" in such a way as to lead him to the "holy face" that stand in dramatic opposition here to the figure of time, ". . . the quiet gentleman / Whose beard wags in Egyptian wind." The last two stanzas, two couplets, seem to Emery merely tacked-on lines salvaged from other poems (WDT 151). The first of these simply states that the poet cannot make up his mind as to what combination of mental faculties -- reason, emotion, blind impulse -- are adequate instruments to be used in the quest for "the holy face" within yet which do not turn that face into a mummy's dust. The second couplet is more suggestive: "The ball I threw while playing in the park / Has not yet reached the ground." Another allusion to his childhood Eden of Cwmdonkin Park, these lines are interpreted by Walford Davies to mean that the inner quest of stanza 1 is an unending, lifelong quest that requires the setting aside of "presumptuous knowingness about life" in favor of "something like Keats's idea of Negative Capability -- a willingness to remain 'in un-

certainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'"[33] Also quoting as applicable to this poem Keats's view that "'only a gradual ripening of the intellectual powers'" (SP 106) is desirable, Davies puts Thomas's poem in better company than it may deserve as a poem, but he accurately locates its central idea in the Romantic concern for the poet's mental powers and for how these powers may enlarge, estrange, or destroy that which these faculties perceive. The still sailing ball may be sustained in its flight by imagination, memory, or the older poet's relentless desire to find a way to overcome time, the Egyptian gentleman, who would otherwise control the flight of the ball downward into the darkness of adult self-consciousness. Arcing above the ground where the poet stands but below the sky, the still sailing ball connects the poet with the cosmos beyond gravity. Two final lines omitted from the printed version of the poem make this self/cosmos identity clear: "Regard the moon, it hands above the lawn; / Regard the lawn, it lies beneath the moon" (LVW 17). Here, of course, the verb "regard" implies an ineffectual detachment equivalent to the destructive intrusion of reason into the psyche in stanza 1. A very intellectual poem for Thomas, "Should lanterns shine" admits to real doubts about the efficacy if the traditional means by which ultimate Romantic goals are achieved.

Another poem that investigates the efficacy of a Romantic power -- transforming love -- is "When, like a running grave" (P 99-101). Repeating the psychic division of heart and head that stymied the "boy of love" in "Should lanterns shine" from finding the inner image of his love, here the poet concentrates entirely, almost obsessively, on sexual love. W. S. Merwin's brief commentary represents the majority view on this poem: it "makes both sexual love and the love of the world im-

possible: the poet advocates despair of either and, instead, love of death himself for his devilish iniquity." Other readings emphasize the self-centered "Romantic Agony" (Davies, EPW, xiv) of the poet's attitude toward love and death, a division of love into sexual and intellectual love, or a dialectic of love and death. Standing somewhat apart from this cluster is Clark Emery's more affirmative interpretation of the poem as a "revolution" led by the poet as general of the forces of love against the twin enemies world and death (WDT 115-17). As Emery sees it, the forces of love win the war insofar as sexual love leads to new life which robs death of final victory. Although Emery's reading is extractable and draws some support from the fact that other poems of this period celebrate love as a transforming power, it does fail to emphasize the long term desperateness of such a victory that does not save the individual nor transcend the physical in its fleshly "resurrection" of new births. Complex in images that may be untangled into simple statements, the gnarled clutteredness of disparate images leaves the impression of an almost suffocating struggle to evoke sexual love as a power capable of overcoming death. The poet is like an engineer coaxing more and more voltage out of an already over-burdened electric love-generator. Stanzas 1-5, a single, incredible sentence, address "my masters, head and heart" who, like gods, are exhorted to "deliver" the poet from the "running grave" of time that brings two kinds of death: love, and death itself. Love itself is a kind of death because in the act of sex the woman takes life from the man with her "scythe of hairs" (also the lost pubic hair of age) because love rationalized by the head ("dome") is dead, because sex leads to children who impinge upon the self's autonomy and remind the poet of his nearing death, and because religious taboos suppress sexual instinct thus leading to the death-in-

life of lifelong virginity and/or masturbation. Nevertheless, the poet argues (st. 5) since there is no weapon against death but sexual love, he will "stride through Cadaver's country in my force," the same force, no doubt, that drives the flower through the green fuse. In contrast, stanza 6 prophesies detumescence in images of an auctioneer's falling hammer and an airplane's failing throttle. Stanzas 7-8 are cryptic statements about the relation of love, death, and joy. If "sir and madam" are the poet's "masters," heart and head, then the poet is saying that sexual love is not at its most powerful when performed by man and woman (st. 7) but rather when it is seen as identical with death (st. 8). Thus, "joy" derives from the bizarre knowledge that the necrophilic processes of death (st. 8) are sexual love, so that by a sort of metaphorical legerdemain, love triumphs over death by coalescing with it! This reading explains the last stanza (st. 10) where the poet's "madmen" (the lovers) first perceive the feverish ubiquitousness of death (ll. 1-3) followed by love's triumph (in a dual metaphor of prostitution and card-playing :

> love for his trick,
> Happy Cadaver's hunger as you /‾the madmen lovers‾/ take
> The kissproof world.

Though regarding itself as intractable to love, the world (the necrophilic world of the dead as well as the sexually repopulated world of the living dead -- "Cadaver's country") is taken by the trick (both meanings) of love. Far from the broader claims for love as a higher power fostered by the poet's imagination, this poem, although it represents Thomas's recurrent mephitic obsessions, also represents the poet's honest desire to put forward the best possible case for the forces of decay in the exterior world as well as the interior world of the body and to attack those forces with love in its simplest and therefore least

problematical form.

The remaining significant poems from the 1934-36 period represent an effort, fully realized in the sonnets of Altarwise by Owl-light, to build on certain notebook poems (such as "From love's first fever," "Before I knocked," and "If I were tickled") that made use of all or part of the human life-cycle from sperm and egg to embryo, foetus, child, boy, youth, adult, and old man as metaphor for the self's psychological experience of unity of being, estranging fall, and consequent desire, through poetry, love, imagination, to regain unity of being. Since Altarwise is nearly Thomas's last word on this idea presented by such a metaphor, the 1934-36 poems that connect Altarwise to its notebook ancestors will be more briefly considered here.

The simplest of the "gestation poems" is undoubtedly "I dreamed my genesis" (P 102-03). Critical interpretations of this poem vary considerably. It may be read as one of Thomas's "dark" gestation poems, the metallic and mechanistic images of stanzas 1-3 revealing man's sexual imprisonment in deterministic natural cycles. On the other hand, the poem's odd division into three sections (st. 1-3, 4-6, 7) representing a first death, a second death, and a final resurrection leads one to guess that the poem is concerned not only with physical death but with the death-in-life of self-consciousness and the desire to escape through dreams that subdue the rational faculty in favor of a Lawrentian blood-consciousness (WDT 303-05).[34] All of these readings seem applicable to various aspects of the poem: what is significant is that the "dream" unites memory and prophecy, physical birth and death (st. 1-3) and psychic birth, death, and rebirth as Universal Man. Stanzas 1-3 describe the first cycle of birth and death: the physical. Man is conceived and born in a mechanistic nature: the "rotating shell"

of the female receives the phallic "drill" to produce a child that is born to know "the irons in the grass," "metal / Of suns," and "the man-melting night." Growing up to psychic maturity ("I / Rounded by globe of heritage") the poet comes to know himself as a creature of the dark faculty of reason in a mechanistic world: " /‾I‾/ journey / In bottom gear through night-geared man." The mature poet's recollection of his birth causes a second birth-death cycle, this time a psychic one, beginning in stanza 4 where the poet's "death" leads to a new sense of cosmic oneness with both the living and the dead (st. 5) in his "second struggling from the grass." Psychic rebirth, associated with the regenerative power of the dream, occurs in stanza 6:

> /‾the‾/ second
> Rise of the skeleton and
> Rerobing of the naked ghost.

In stanza 7, tiring both of the physical and the psychological cycles of genesis and death ("grown / Stale of Adam's brine"), the speaker seems to put his final hope in the poet's imaginative vision that re-creates man as cosmic man, seeking identity with the sun: ". . . vision / Of new man strength, I seek the sun." The poet's reconciling, creative imagination that makes man into new man and links man and sun fulfills the dream of genesis, and, like the halting dawn of "Light breaks . . . brings an end to all cycles.

A more problematical but ultimately less satisfying poem is "The seed-at-zero" (P 125-27). Made of eight stanzas paired off in four groups of two by almost identical phrasing, this poem, like Stevens' similar tour de force "Sea-Surface Full of Clouds," seems as much as anything the poet's virtuoso display of imagination's power to shape and reshape the world by a re-arrangement or slight alteration of certain words in parallel stanzas otherwise identical in phrasing. Stanford

is right in seeing the subject of the poem as Romantic pantheism, the description of the spirit (the seed at zero) entering nature. Referring to the "zero hour" of action as well as the idea of imminent potential, the "seed at zero" appears variously as the life force, human seed, cosmic energy, and, most significantly, as the "Christ principle" of regeneration and redemption that the declaiming poet seems to hope to be able to activate by speaking this horatory poem (cf. "And death shall have no dominion"). Stanzas 1-4, describing the entrance into a fortress-like nature of pure physicality of the "god-in-hero"), argue that the "star-flanked seed" will not storm the fortress but will enter gently and unobtrusively in a rain of manna riddling the sea and falling in "a virgin stronghold." Stanzas 5-6, without explicitness, reinforce this earlier suggestion that the "dew" is a kind of Christ: though a continent denies him, a "humble village" will "labour" to bring him forth, sailors will hide him (from Herod? RG 93). Emery speculates that the hero is "Blake's Jesus" (WDT 288). Appropriating Christian ideas for non-orthodox purposes again, Thomas is simply looking to conjure up -- in sperm, Christ, poet-as-Christ, Blake's Christ, natural vitalism, imagination -- any Christ-like power that can give him power over the external world which he sees as a fortress to be taken, not by main force but by love. Stanzas 7-8 conclude the poem on a note of despair: once present in nature (caught in its cycles) the hero-seed, now seen as an artillery captain, can neither escape the "grave-groping place" nor return to the "sky-scraping place." Loving subterfuge from within, apparently, will not do. This poem represents, then, an unsuccessful attempt to "displace" Christ from Christian orthodoxy into pantheism, but incarnation proves to be a deadly trap.

A more personal poem on sexual intercourse as man's only hope after

the fall is "A grief ago" (P 114-15). Almost universally disliked by commentators as grotesquely over-ornate in clashing imagery, the poem drew support, just after its publication in a journal, from Edith Sitwell. In a lovely sentence she seems to have caught the poem's main idea: "its evocation both of the lost Eden, lost for all eternity, and the thought that the beloved is the ground from which all the flowers of that lost Eden are grown."[35] In fact, the states of Eden, fall, and redemption are internalized, physically, as (1) the moment of sexual union, (2) the parting after ("a grief ago"), and (3) the redemption from death implicit in the birth of children who symbolize love's victory over death. A modern Adam and Eve ("she who lies / Like exodus a chapter from the garden"), they find their lost Eden in sexual union and in children. Stanza 1 describes their union in terms that link them to the exotic in nature -- "fats and flower" -- and in the supernatural -- "Hell wind and sea" thus uniting in Dantesque fashion with her who "rose maid and male," flowering in the act of love, a "masted Venus" on the ship of sex and containing the tumescent male. In stanza 2, ejaculation leads to the conception of the embryo ("frog") who is to suffer the pains of incarnation and growth, "the aaron / Rose cast to plague." Stanza 3 is devoted to the period of pregnancy. Fallen from original virginal innocence, the lover incurs the "lily's anger" of the Virgin and lies outside the Eden of childhood innocence, the "ropes of heritage" her human and umbilical ties to past and future generations with whom she shares the fate of falling from girlhood to womanhood, then rising to motherhood, love's victory over death. Stanza 4 begins with the poet's awed reverence for the mother-to-be whom he has loved: "Who then is she, / She holding me?" Her children to come are her love's victory:

> That she I have
> The country-handed grave boxed into love /so that she might/
> Rise before dark.

In a rare explication of his own verse, Thomas himself confirms that this is an image of death, a grave as a boxer whose gloves are countries and who boxes (confines/leaves cornered with no choice) the poet into performing the act of love (SL 198). Stanza 5, however, ends in despair of love: time shall take the woman and her children ("her dead"), so let us "inhale" the still gestating child like a breath and never let it out into the world of time for the children's "gypsy eyes" are "grave." Neither father-poet nor his offspring can find Eden in the act of love, for sexual union must end in parting as must every pregnancy, each an "exodus" from the woman's "genesis." To know Eden is to lose it, Thomas seems to say, and neither love nor (in other poems) imagination seems capable of recovering that lost unity which Thomas himself knew as a child in his two Eden-places: Fern Hill and Cwmdonkin Park.

A more interesting example of this seemingly inexhaustible theme of conception, birth, and death is "Then was my neophyte" (P 128-29). As in "A grief ago," the poet here looks back to an Eden state (the womb, childhood), examines love's promise as a redemptive power, and ends in despair of that power. What distinguishes this poem from "A grief ago," however, is the presence of imagination in the images of landscape paintings, myths, photography, and motion pictures and a mysterious "He" whom I take to be the imagination itself, creator of these forms of art, and the Christ-like promiser of redemption. That Thomas is on record as liking this poem best of all those collected in Twenty-Five Poems (SL 178) is not surprising, for "Then was my neophyte" expresses a deep fear so characteristic of Modernist writers who inherit Romantic problems but so often despair of Romantic solutions.

Something of a dejection ode, this poem is a profound questioning of the efficacy of imagination, ending in a terrifying conclusion that no construct of that power can overcome the ultimate enemy: time. Stanzas 1-2 describe simultaneously the physical gestation and birth of a "neophyte" or child and also his psychological evolution from a sense of unity to a fall into division and finally his search for love as the power to heal division. In the womb or in a holistic landscape, the child is a priest of his world, kneeling like a religious novice before a "bell of rocks" (nature = a church) by "twelve disciple seas," his "white blood" like a priest's white garb a symbol of innocence and psychic wholeness. In this Eden place (womb/child's view of nature), there is unity: "a green day and night" and "my sea hermaphrodite" reveal a world where opposites in nature are verdantly one and sexual division is as foreign as psychic division. However, all unities lead to divisions in Thomas; thus, the "snail" of foetus or nature's child falls into the twin divisions of birth and adulthood. Life becomes a journey in a burning "ship of fire" whose goal is a new island-Eden called, in a striking phrase, "the green rock of light." The helmsman of this ship is the capitalized "He," identified by Stephens as either "a God of creative love, a divine poet as myth-maker, or a God of destructive historical time."[36] Tindall opts for the Christian Jesus but only as an "analogy" for the development of embryo and/or poet-as-religious-novice (RG 124). If one entertains the idea of "He" as a failed version of Blake's Jesus-as-Imagination, all of these guesses can be accommodated with little strain. The emergence of this "He" in stanzas 1-2 corresponds to the growing child's awakening sense of estrangement. The "hermaphrodite" of stanza 1 yields to the Aphrodite of stanza 2 ("moon-blown shell"), the "green rock of light" to the

"flat cities" and the "fishes' house and hell" of the contemporary, infertile wasteland. At the point of fall, the "green child" of Romantic tradition yearns for "His green myths," imagination's Christ-like promise of redemption. As Emery suggests (WDT 212-24), one can view this poem as a conflict between science and religion, or more accurately, between a rationalistic and an imaginative vision of nature. Stanza 2 ends with an oil painting, a landscape, painted by imagination with its color of love ("love in His oils"), yet the painting remains a "landscape grief," its child "like a grail" catching love's running color which cannot cover over "time on the canvas paths." In other words, though the poet wants to write a Romantic landscape poem (like his own later poems) he fears that imagination is a cheat. Stanza 3 confirms his fear. Now a moviegoer watching imagination's film of his own childhood, the poet realizes that "He films my vanity." Yet the film is alluring: it presents the "green child" unafflicted by rationalism's doubts ("headless boy"), needing only "a finger and thumb" to communicate and commune in Edenic "children's parks," a perfect instance of "Love's image" that the poet's own image-making imagination here presents to him as that Romantic image that heals all divisions. Stanza 4 contains a dialogue between imagination and the skeptic but yearning poet whose "heartbone breaks" to see the "Love's image" of green children playing on the green rock of light. That the poem ends in a division (dialogue) between the poet and his own imagination after three stanzas in which the poet and his imagination remains related is significant. Seeing his own decay (ll. 2-3) as evidence that time "kills my history" just as all films must end, the poet exclaims "time kills me terribly." Imagination's reply, addressed to the poet as child, is that the child self is indestructible: "'Time shall not

murder you . . . / Nor the green nought be hurt'" (nought = wholeness). The child is forever "green and unborn and undead," an eternal state. Yet the adult poet has the final lines: "I saw time murder me." The poet's central question here is to ask where reality lies, in childhood, imagination, and loving creativity or else in a rationally perceived nature of death and time, an untransformable physical and psychic hell? In stanza 2 Christ the Imagination shed his Love-colored blood into the child's grail in the landscape painting, but in vain; for the adult poet remains locked in self-consciousness, feverishly aware of imagination's home movie of childhood even as it passes. As in "Our eunuch dreams," another poem that uses a cinematic metaphor, where the question "What is the world?" is asked, here too that question presents itself. Unlike the earlier poem, however, whose heroes "shall flower as they love," here love is defeated by time. A profoundly moving poem in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode, "Then was my neophyte" demonstrates what Thomas's detractors so often overlook: the fact that he was not a naive, unthinking Romantic, the easy prey of nostalgia for a childhood that never was. On the contrary, Thomas, like most Romantics, questioned the efficacy of imagination even to the point of despair. The evocations of childhood in the later poems like "Fern Hill" represent a hard-won faith in imagination that should be compared to earlier poems such as this one or the poems that came out of Thomas's witnessing of children burned to death by fire-bombs dropped on London in World War II.

A more obscure but less pessimistic handling of the theme of "Then was my neophyte" is "My world is pyramid" (P 103-05). Divided into two sections of five stanzas each, this poem dramatizes the psychic journey from a unity of opposites (in the images of conception and birth)

to self-division (in the images of physical growth) and finally to reintegration (the mysterious image of the "secret child"). Section I (st. 1-5) presents the now familiar scene: the embryo ("the salt unborn") is a unity of opposites (st. 1), "half" father's sperm that "doubles" at conception with mother's "half"; sexual halves that make up one are joined by the halves of life and death (st. 2), principles in nature that grow out of one another ("corrosive spring out of the iceberg's crop"), symbolized in the lost and fertilizing sperm ("the lost / And the unplanted ghost") which also recall Satan and Christ; the growth of the foetus to birth contrasts an unusually harsh (for Thomas) view of sex as disgusting, the genitalia as "the wild pigs' wood and slime upon the tree" as well as the "cyanide" kiss and Medusa-like "braiding adders" of the foetus's hair contrasting the natural-supernatural "arterial angel" of the newborn child; and finally, the parents' response to the mystery of birth by asking questions, as in "Why east wind chills" that assume rational answers to irrational life: "What colour is glory? death's feather?" (st. 5). Appealing to heaven, the questioning parents receive no answer from Christ ("the ghost is dumb that stammered in the stars"), are blinded by Satan ("the ghost that hatched his havoc as he flew") and so remain empty and confounded at the child's birth. Section I is a third-person narrative, detached, like the doubling-and-dividing action it rather coldly reports. Section II, however, is spoken by the newborn child who recounts his post-natal history of estrangement and cosmic unity. Beginning in the womb, the child tells us "my world is pyramid." As Emery notes (WDT 308) a pyramid is four-sided, the number 4 being an ancient symbol for unity. Yet a pyramid is also a place of death, and, significantly, as seen in "Should lanterns shine," a symbol for the poet's own

psyche. Fearing to leave the womb of perfect death-like unity, the child is born into a world where inner self and outer reality are one: "I scrape through resin to a starry home / And a blood parhelion." A mock-sun or ghost of the sun, the parhelion in the blood are its sun-like cells which match the bones that structure the flesh as stars enzone the sky. Stanza 2 records the adventures of the cosmic child who identifies with all the dead in churchyards or World War I battle-fields (st. 2) whose soldiers die like Christs as they "cry Eloi to the guns." Identifying with the dead, the child identifies in stanza 3 with all the waters of the earth and the fertile continents of the psyche ("my grave," i.e., my pyramid) by its discovery of a redeeming imagination ("the crossing Jordan"), the regeneration of the inner Eden out of the psyche-grave (the waters "drip on my dead house garden"), and the child's assumption of its own Christhood in a reference to the manger ("marking in my mouth / The straws of Asia"). The child-Christ even journeys to "the Atlantic corn" of the New World, New Eden. Stanza 4 seems to describe the cosmic child from the perspective of gossipy, orthodox prudery ("the tongue of heaven's gossip") as in Emily Dickinson's poem "I taste a liquor never brewed." To the astonished Welsh Puritans, the child is a Satanic figure ("the unborn devil") with "burning fork" but the child, earlier born as "the arterial angel" of a sacramental nature, knows himself as the power of imagination, "binding my angel's head." Stanza 5, the last of the poem, repeats the question about glory's color and death's feather that the child's astonished parents found no rational or orthodox answer for in Section I, stanza 5. Assuming his full stature as natural supernatural god of erotic love, the child answers that his powers of love, whose color is red, produce glory and overcome the feather of death that the red blood

as "the stammel feather in the vein" defeats. The poem ends with the child's designation of himself as "the secret child" who drives a sea-going military lorry of the loin ("the half-tracked thigh") in the sea of generation which he governs yet from which he stays "dry." Clark Emery has discovered that the phrase "the secret child" comes from Blake's Europe whose first lines, in parody of Milton's Nativity Ode read:

> The deep of winter came
> What time the secret child
> Descended thro the orient gates of the eternal day.
> (WDT 306)

Noting that Blake's secret child is non-orthodox, the idea of Jesus as Imagination and Love in Everyman, Emery provides striking evidence for the present reading of Section II as the history of the poet-child's psychic development into cosmic man, uniting self and universe, self and all the forms of death and life, self and the Romantic figure of the poet as an outlaw-Satan, and the self with the power of love that defeats death and triumphs in its own glory (II, st. 1-5).

Two final poems from the 1934-36 period that attempt massive syntheses of all the opposites under the aegis of the poet's images are "All all and all the dry worlds lever" (P 106-07) and "I, in my intricate image" (P 108-112). The last poem in 18 Poems and the first poem in Twenty-Five Poems, the two poems represent, prior to Altarwise, Thomas's most strenuous efforts to transform the outer world, in the first instance through the power of love and in the second through the power of the Romantic image.

If Bloom is right in seeing Romantic love as a revolutionary force that replaces each Romantic's earlier hopes for direct political revolution, then Thomas's "All all and all . . ." is a poem in that tradition.

Divided into three sections of two stanzas each, the poem employs a tetrameter line with an extra unstressed syllable in almost every fourth foot and a strong medial caesura to create the impression of a rollicking world stirred up out of its own dessication by the forces of love that lead, in the final stanza, beyond simple erotic renewal to political revolution and mystical union, both via love. Section I is devoted to a series of evocative phrases that seem to tell the story of the geological evolution of the earth. In stanza 1 we move from the "stage of ice" to ocean, oil, lava, plant life ("city of spring, the governed flower") and finally human society in a dessicated state ("the ashen / Towns"). That ice is like an actor on a stage, that human towns are like volcanoes ("ashen"), and that flowers are organized politically into a "city" of "governed" plants indicate that the "lever" which activates one of these "worlds" will activate the others ("all all and all"). That the lever is erotic love becomes clear in stanza 2 where the poet addresses his penis ("my naked fellow") that has evolved, like man, out of the sea (1.2) and that holds the future ("the glanded morrow") in its potency. This phallic lever can, apparently, move the world: "All of the flesh, the dry worlds lever," a feat which might startle Archimedes himself. Section II addresses two problems faced by the lover: (1) a sense of sin instilled by religion and (2) the feeling that nature is a mechanistic prison that orders this levering, thereby reducing love from a revolutionary act to a simple compulsion. Annis Pratt, who sees the poem as a "conflict of object and subject" (erotic self/dry world) argues that the metallic and mechanistic images of Section II represent an heroic attempt, like Crane's The Bridge, by the self to incorporate even the non-organic into its unification of opposites.[37] To achieve such unification, even the

act of poetic creation and of love may be seen in terms of "screws": "fear not the screws that turn the voice, / And the face to the driven lover." In Section III, having embraced metal and mechanism (not at all incommensurate with a phallic lever), the poet presents a synthesis of erotic love of the speaker-poet with nature and with human society. In stanza 1, male and female "ghosts" unite, "contagious man" spreading the fever of love (cf. "From love's first fever") from the single couple to whole worlds whose circle of the birth-death cycle which the couple "squares" into the number 4, here, as in "My world is pyramid," a symbol of psychic unity. Stanza 2, one of Thomas's best, goes further to produce "the people's fusion," a thirties concept displaced from Leftist politics into a Romantic's revolutionary love (with a pun on sexual union). Love is the revolution, revealed in the "flesh's vision" -- erotic love being thus a portal to a greater, cosmic love that unites all with all in the poem's final line: "Flower, flower, all, all, and all."

What love can do in "All all and all the dry worlds lever" the poet's "images" purport to do in "I, in my intricate image." An opus in three sections of six stanzas each, this poem attempts to present a complete picture of the poet as creator of the Romantic image that unifies all opposites and, as an expression of imagination, redeems man from a world of death. Section I is a history of the poet as image-maker that takes us from the origins of his understanding of the nature of the image to his creation of them and their subsequent voyage from his imagination into the world of nature and its cycles of birth and death. The poet's claim in stanza 1 that he strides on "two levels has been generally assumed to mean the realms of body and spirit, or possibly persona and poem. Since, however, the poet exists

on these levels in the form of his "image," these two levels may be the world of the poem (made of words that are images) and the world of nature (made of images that are things, and possibly words as well). If this is so, then the poet ("the brassy orator"), by "laying my ghost in metal" not only means that his imprint becomes incarnate in his body (metal = flesh) but that his task as poet is to unite the twin "images" of poetic works and natural things. Further support for this reading may be found in stanzas 2-3 which are intentionally parallel in idea and opening phrases. Stanza 2 presents the usual Thomas picture of natural process, seen here in its springtime phase that begins with a death ("doom in the bulb") and ends with the creation of man (l. 5). In response to the cycles of natural creation, the poet, in stanza 3, once aware of death ("doom in the ghost") forges his "image of images," his imagistic poem whose images come from nature (external) yet also arise from the creative mind (internal) to fuse inner and outer in supernatural guise: "I, in my fusion of rose and male motion / Create this twin miracle." Uniting nature (rose) and the poet's creative act (male motion), the poet creates his child-poem (both Romantic poem and Romantic child make no distinction between inner and outer image). Stanzas 4-6 form a cluster whose meaning may be disentangled as follows. The unity of being represented by the child/poem of stanza 3 is threatened by the poet's entrance into adult consciousness (st. 4) which entails a knowledge of death and the corresponding urge to procreation which forms "the natural parallel" between the course of human and of natural life. This being so, the poet attempts to unite his images (that earlier united with his child-like vision of a creating nature) with the sexual process: "my images stalk the trees and the silent sap's tunnel." This effort seems to fail

at first, leaving the poet as a crucified Christ stuck inside his own mind with anti-natural images ("the wooden insect," "the glass bed of grapes") while "hearing the weather fall" in the external world. In stanza 6, these failed images are seen as invalids withdrawn into a seaside sanitorium. Rather than remain in sterile, aesthetic withdrawal, the images are sent on a quest by the poet into the outer world of time ("voyaging clockwise"). That quest is the subject of Sections II and III. In Section II, the images discover only a world of natural beauty infested with death. Like divers going into the water, the images enter the outer world (st. 2) to find "a quarrel of weathers and trees." Three stanzas enclosed in parentheses (sts. 3-4, 6) are the poet's ridiculing of death for its usurping claims as the final governor of the world, stanza 6 being a bizarre picture of fallen nature as a dissonant phonograph album being played on a bad record player with a "stylus of lightning." Enclosed within these parenthetical stanzas, stanza 5 presents a contrasting picture of the diving images. Like Christ harrowing hell, the poet's redeeming images dive into the sea where they bring to life the bells of a sunken church (ll. 2-3), become wind-harps strung with sea-weed (l. 5), arouse a "triton" (the sea fish and the semi-human deity -- half man, half fish), and raise the dead (ll. 3,6). Here is a complex of Romantic ideas -- images of redemption that rise up from below (nature/unconscious), the wind-harp whose songs are one with the natural breeze that incites them, Triton who is a figure of man and nature coalescing, and the redemptive power of imagination whose images speak here with the sea's dead. In Section III, the theme of this isolated stanza becomes the subject of six stanzas. Still embattled in the world of death that dominates most of Section II, the images fight on in their sea battle. Shifting to

the imperative mood, the poet addresses his images, exhorting them to sacrifice themselves so that from the sea they may be transfigured into "a double angel" growing up from the sea floor as miraculous as "a tree on Aran." Having attained the status of the Romantic image, the poet's images become that single Image ("your one ghost," he addresses them) formed of nature ("brass") and the imagination's words ("the bodiless image"). This Romantic image, capable of uniting Jacob with heaven, natural and hallucenogenic perception, Hamlet and Prospero, mechanism and vision (stanza 2, ll. 3-6), moves on in stanza 3 to the task left unfinished in Section I: the union of the poet's images with love as expressed in human sexuality. Here, in polysemous language that describes a birth as well as the sea-battling images' immersion in the sea of copulating lovers, the images "suffer the slash of vision" as the poet orders the lovers to surrender to the images their love: "Give over, lovers . . . / Love." The images having seized the power of love, the poet, in stanza 4, resumes the first person, identifies himself with the images charged with love, and carries out the final action of battle: "I, in a wind on fire, from green Adam's cradle, / No man more magical, clawed out the crocodile." The "wind on fire" is the fiery, image-laden breath of the poet -- a figure of nature, childhood, and Edenic innocence. Possessed by imagination ("magical"), he defeats the beast that is death, time, the fallen world -- recalcitrance of any sort that stands in the way of apocalypse. Reviewing anticlimactically the crocodile state from which the poet and his images have rescued man (st. 5 and 6, ll. 1-4), Thomas ends the poem in a mood of complete, heroic triumph: "This was the god of beginning in the intricate sea-swirl, / And my images roared and rose on heaven's hill." The poet, as we saw in Section I (st. 2-3), modeled his own process of poetic

creation on God's whose "intricate seaswirl" is matched by the poet's "intricate image." In the final apotheosis, the sea-warrior images have landed in heaven and are storming its hill, achieving the final union of everything in a supreme display of the powers of the Romantic image and its successful creation by the Romantic poet. Clark Emery is surely right to see the central action of this poem as "the transition from natural man to imaginative man" (WDT 313). Only the ten sonnets of Altarwise by Owl-light attempt on a grander scale to display the Romantic poet in action. With an analysis of those ten sonnets, the culmination of Thomas's earlier poetry (1928-36), Chapter IV will close.

Altarwise by Owl-light (1935-36). Thomas's most ambitious early poem, Altarwise by Owl-light is a sequence of ten sonnets employing consonantal rhymes and in which the sestets precede the octaves. Sonnets I-VII were first published in Life and Letters Today (XII;2, December, 1935) as "Poems for a Poem." In a contributor's note, Thomas said that he hoped the readers liked the poem "despite its obscurity and incompleteness. It's the first passage of what's going to be a very long poem indeed."[38] However, only three more sonnets appeared in the sequence, published in the May and July 1936 issues of Contemporary Poetry and Prose (P 262). Vernon Watkins has recorded his own experience of hearing Thomas read Sonnets I-VII as a group and then of hearing the last three sonnets later on: "Last of all he /Thomas/ read the sonnet sequence, of which he had then written seven, beginning 'Altarwise by owl light in the half-way house.' He looked up on reading the last line: 'On rose and icicle the ringing handprint.' It was not many weeks before he added three more sonnets, on the Crucifixion, Egyptian burial, and the Resurrection, to the sequence. He intended to write more sonnets and make it a much longer work, but the sequence

of ten sonnets was all he completed, and that is how it appears in his Collected Poems" (LVW 13-14). In addition to Watkins' comments, a few scattered remarks by Thomas on the sonnets survive. In a December, 1935 letter to Rayner Heppenstall Thomas mentions that he is "writing a very long poem" (SL 163) which is almost certainly Altarwise. A year later he wrote to Glyn Jones that "that Work in Progress thing" was in the end a "mad parody," a carrying of "certain features to their obvious conclusion" (SL 178), features that had dominated the earlier poetry. To Henry Treece (1938) Thomas recounted his dismay at Edith Sitwell's impressionistic gloss of the sestet (ll. 1-6) of Sonnet I as meaning "'the violent speed and the sensation-loving, horror-loving craze of modern life.'" Insisting that she missed "the literal meaning" of the images that form "a particular incident in a particular adventure," Thomas "glosses" the lines by simply giving alternative images for those that make up lines 1-6 of Sonnet I (SL 198-99). Finally, in an interview at the University at Utah, Thomas responded to questions about the obscurity of the Altarwise sonnets: "Those sonnets are only the writings of a boily boy in love with the shapes and shadows in his pillow . . . they would be of interest to another boily boy, Or a boily girl. Boily-girly."[39] The poet as teapot boiling over, though a joke, is also a clue to answering the central question that plagues the many critics of these sonnets: how is one to understand Thomas's use here of elements of the Christian myth?

Although it is not possible to know whether Thomas finally came to see Sonnets I-X as fragments of a longer work or a complete poem in themselves, the addition of Sonnets VIII-X, which deal with the Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection of a "hero," seem to most readers to provide a suitable ending to the manifold complexities of the sequence.

Thomas's own comment that the "Work in Progress" carried certain ideas to the point of self-parody at least indicates that Thomas felt he could go no further in writing this or similar poems. Like so many of the earlier poems which have been considered, Altarwise deals with the conception, birth, life, and death of a hero; the creative development of the hero as a poet; a corresponding sexual maturation; and finally, and in this poem most fully, the identification of the poet with the figure of Christ. This last concern raises the question that divides all critics of this poem into one of only two camps: (1) those who believe that Thomas is writing an orthodox Christian poem and (2) those who believe that Thomas is making use of (among others) Chrisitan myth as structuring device by means of which psychological and artistic matters can be discussed. In its most complete form, the latter view would see the "hero" of the poem as a composite of the various figures in the poem, Adam and Christ and the Poet being the most important. The action of the poem would be seen as the struggle of the poet to assume his own Christhood, to achieve the Romantic displacement of the categories of Christian myth into secular, poetic experience. Various critics have assumed that the Altarwise sonnets are orthodox Christian poems. These critics see the poems as a more or less chronological account of Christ's birth, life, and death with a good deal of reference to Old Testament events that made Christ's life and sacrifice necessary. Whether the poet's attitude toward this biography of Christ is reverential or doubting is a matter of dispute. H. H. Kleinman, the author of the only book-length study of the sonnets, believes that "the sonnets are a deeply moving statement of religious perplexity concluding in spiritual certainty," an assertion supported by Bernard Kneiger in his essay "The Christianity of the 'Altarwise by Owl-light' Sequence"; however, Naomi

Christensen, who also reads the sonnets as Thomas's recounting of the Christian myth, believes, rather unaccountably, that Thomas's attitude toward Christ is one of despair.[40] Other critics are more puzzled by the nature of Thomas's attitude toward Christian myth, not seeing it as a matter of total acceptance or complete rejection. Walford Davies asks, for instance, "is the Christian story being used dramatically only, and not as a matter of actual belief? . . . finally this is the difficult question." Davies' own answer, first contained in a review of Kleinman's The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas, is that the first level of narrative in the sequence is the autobiographical one. Speaking of the poem's key figures, the Poet and Christ, Davies says that "the biography is firstly and specifically that of the poet himself. It cannot be denied that identities mix, as they do so often elsewhere in Thomas, but the insistence of the narrative on autobiography as the primary pattern must be recognized."[41] Howard Sergeant sees what Davies sees but does not like it, complaining that "one is left floundering between the actual biblical account and Thomas's idosyncratic interpretation of the Scriptures" while David Holbrook, Thomas's inveterate enemy among the critics, found the poet-Christ identity disgusting and regressive.[42] Clark Emery, on the other hand, comes closer to my understanding of the poem when he claims that Altarwise is Thomas's attempt, in Blakean mode, to separate the true Christhood of Everyman from the dogmatism and historicity of institutional Christianity (WDT 214f.). Emery's viewpoint is the central one, balanced on one side by the Christian critics and on the other by those who follow Walford Davies in seeing the poem as essentially another portrait of the artist or growth of a poet's mind.

First among critics who read the poem as Romantic autobiography of the poet as poet is William York Tindall (RG 126f.). Tindall reads each

sonnet as a phase in the poet's life, a life whose central concern is the poet's battle to integrate the male and female principles of his psyche, inherited from his parents, in the very act of learning to write poems. The sequence takes us from the poet's childhood to his first discovery of words, through the printing of his poems, to his final apotheosis as Poet-Saviour of the world. Tindall's general approach is very close to my own but Tindall's analysis suffers considerably by his frequent downplaying of a quite obviously prominent Christian element in the sonnets.. Although Tindall is quite right in saying that "the theme is Thomas himself, the constant subject of his verse and prose" (RG 127), Tindall too readily glosses complex images by giving a general autobiographical reading that minimizes Thomas's powerful attraction to certain aspects of Christianity. In addition to Davies and Tindall, Peter Revell has written an essay that sees Altarwise as "a physical and spiritual autobiographical voyage," the "'holy sonnets' of the new-made Adam of himself." Emphasizing somewhat more than Tindall the sexual and Christian images in the poem, Revell concludes that the sonnets make up a "highly compressed epic" whose narrator is a poet whose psyche is composed of four "emanations": (1) Poet-Adam, (2) Christ-Mary, (3) Sun-Hercules, and (4) various male-female sexual entities.[43] Finally, even Rushworth Kidder, whose book is an attempt to define three distinct types of religious (mainly Christian) imagery in Thomas, concludes (with dismay) that, after all, Altarwise is "a kind of spiritual autobiography" whose religious images are peripheral to the self, thus making the poem "an intriguing and extravagant failure."[44]

A final and most famous reading of the sonnets that could be placed into either the Christian or the autobiographical camps is Elder

Olson's prize-winning interpretation contained in his book The Poetry of Dylan Thomas (1954). Olson claims that the Altarwise sonnets yield six distinct levels of interpretations: (1) a comparison of the cycle of the seasons with the cycle of human life; (2) an analogy between the rising and the setting of the sun, and man; (3) sexual intercourse, conception, birth, and growth of the child into man; (4) an arcane and sophisticated identity of the poet-hero with the sun-god Hercules; (5) an equally arcane and sophisticated implantation of the cycling constellations according to ancient astrological lore in the images of the poem; and (6) the retelling of the central events of Christian history. Although concluding that Thomas's final allegiance is to the Christian view, Olson also lends support to a reading of the poem as a Romantic psychodrama. "Thomas," he says, "devises the strange legend of the sonnets to represent the real processes of his hero's mind."[45] Of these six levels, one may say that level 1 is too much of a commonplace of almost all poetry to be particularly instructive; level 2 is equally so; level 3 has been noticed by almost all critics of Thomas as a common structuring device of most of the longer, early poems; level 6 has also been noticed by several commentators on the sonnets. In his own study, Olson only demonstrates by detailed explication levels 4 and 5, the most controversial ones of the six. The poet-narrator, argues Olson, discusses his own understanding of the nature of evil and man's requisite need for salvation by detailed allusion to the constellations, especially Hercules, the sun, and Cygnus (= the Cross). The poem's hero, whom we first meet at the autumnal equinox ("the halfway house") progresses in the sonnets towards the constellation Ars (= the Altar). Thus the pagan world (Hercules) gives way to the Christian world (Cygnus, Ars) with Sonnet VII as the crucial juncture

between the two. In spite of Olson's learned and gracefully presented arguments, and apart from an extremely useful "rhetoric" of Thomas's poetry detailed in earlier chapters and in a long glossary, most critics now reject Olson's astrological reading of the poem as what Monroe Beardsley and Sam Hynes, in a co-authored essay that uses Altarwise critics as examples of several critical fallacies, call the fallacy of the "Imposed System."[46] Ralph Maud, one of Thomas's most level-headed critics, in a review of Olson complained that Olson generalizes too glibly from the text, his astrological paraphrase being not due "to true insight but rather to the ease of plying between a suggestive poem and a willing mass of zodiacal data."[47] (Nevertheless one sympathizes with Olson. In any case, Maud has never presented a detailed exegesis of all of the Altarwise sonnets and there is a certain brotherhood of agony and frustration that unites all those who attempt a complete explication of these poems). Peter Revell also sees Olson's analysis as "too laboured and elaborate" while Jacob Korg states best the case for those who think Olson is mistaking a single thread for the whole weave: "Thomas," Korg says, "was capable of making allusions to bodies of legend and to recondite lore, and even of working out sustained images involving them; but he would not be expected to weave his verse over the lattice of a prepared framework of information as Olson supposes him to be doing here."[48] The most convincing and sustained refutation of Olson is that by Clark Emery (WDT 214-19). Emery points out that Thomas, in no other poem, story, or letter reveals in the least a detailed knowledge of astrology, nor did his closest friends report such. Emery also points out that Olson ignores the more obvious autobiographical and Christian levels of interpretation which account for more images than the strained and incomplete astrological

reading can do. Finally, Emery demonstrates that either Olson or Thomas or both appear inconsistent in the working out of this "imposed system." Emery says: "What Olson has done is to find a level of meaning constituting a poem in itself which Thomas may or may not have written. He has, so to speak, elaborated the anagogical without explicating the literal" (WDT 219). However this may be, both Korg and Emery admit that no reading of the complex Altarwise sequence can be largely uncontested. Korg admits that all readings of the sonnets are "only provisional" while Emery states that "there can be no final reading of the sonnets; there can only be successive explorations" (WDT 248).[49]

My own "provisional" reading that follows falls somewhere in the critical spectrum between Emery and Tindall. Like Emery, I see the profound significance to Thomas of the figure of Christ (Blake's, not Rome's), yet like Tindall I see Thomas's ultimate concern as autobiographical. Altarwise is Thomas's most ambitious and ambiguous attempt to identify himself as a Romantic poet with the figure of Christ, to displace Christian myth into a personal and psychological context. Ultimately, Altarwise is in the Romantic tradition of the internalized quest and spiritual autobiography of the poet as poet. In Sonnet X, the last, Thomas takes upon himself a part of the role and power of Christ and achieves a reintegration of all opposites in the image of Eden rising up from the drowned waters, what Frye in "The Romantic Myth" calls the Romantic variation on directional movement toward redemption, from the Christian idea of heaven as "up there" to the Romantic concept of an inner heaven of psychic unity and undivided, visionary perception, "down there," in the deeper regions of the human mind and in nature.

Sonnet I: The Poet and His 'Christhood'. The strange variety of interpretations of Sonnet I points out the difficulties in analyzing the Altarwise sequence as a whole. The action of this sonnet has been described as an account of the conception and birth of the poet, the conception and nativity of Christ, Christ's sojourn on the cross, and Christ in the tomb. In my view, the personal pronouns in lines 11 and 13 clearly indicate that both Christ and the poet are present in the sonnet. General summary: the birth of the poet and the death of Christ are presented simultaneously by polysemous metahors (ii. 1-6); Christ, having risen from the tomb, visits the poet in the poet's cradle just as the magi visited Christ (11. 7-13); Christ addresses the infant poet and reveals his (Christ's own) nature to him (11. 13-14). In terms of the Romantic myth, the poet is describing his sense of estrangement from the world and the arising from the subconscious ("that night of time") of his own Blakean Christhood that promises inner and outer unity. Having received this vision of his own greater poetic self, the poet describes in Sonnets II-X the long quest to realize in himself that Christhood which he only sees in a vision in Sonnet I. This general reading is based on the following explication of images. Lines 1-2: a simultaneous description of the conception of the poet and the death of Christ. In the first instance, the poet's father, lying prone like an altar, filled with his sexual passions, enters the mother's grave-like womb, a temporary dwelling-place for the about-to-be conceived poet. In the second instance, Christ, at the dark ninth hour, commensurate with God's commands, in his incarnate body slumped on the cross toward his impending entombment, free of the human passion that tormented him in life. Lines 3-6: a simultaneous description of the poet's birth and Christ's sacrificial

death. In the first instance, the poet's atheistic father (Abaddon, the angel of the bottomless pit), in phallic (hangnail/fork) sin original to Adam gave birth to Dylan the poet, "a dog among the fairies," whose Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog parallels the Altarwise sequence in distinguishing heterosexual, Romantic Thomas (the dog, a reversed god) from certain well known political poets of the thirties who were homosexual. A poet who sought to unite self and world ("the atlas-eater") and who worked as a reporter for the South Wales Evening Post ("a jaw for news"), young Thomas emasculates his father's imminent decline and the poet's rise to power (l. 6). As a description of Christ's sacrificial death, lines 3-6 construe as follows: by his sacrificial death, Christ, whose death was prophetically necessary ever since Adam's sin ("the hangnail cracked from Adam"), defeated the forces of evil (Abaddon, with a pun, A/bad/'un) that "cracked from" (separated from) Adam through Christ's nailing and hanging on the cross. As a result of Abaddon's causing self-division in Adam ("his fork"), Christ, a true incarnate god (thus dog/god, the reversal signifying incarnation as Thomas often puns by reversing words), drives out the pagan deities (the fairies), the saviour of the world whose death (on Friday) which led to the blackest day of the Christian calendar, Holy Saturday ("tomorrow's scream"). The simultaneous action of lines 1-6 is the opening gambit in an attempt to identify the poet's power with Christ's. Lines 7-12 may be interpreted as a sarcastic description by the poet of his aging father (the old cock) who had intercourse with the poet's mother while the poet was a foetus (ll. 11-12). However, I believe that these lines may be more accurately read purely as a description of the risen Christ (after the crucifixion and foreseen burial of ll. 1-6) who visits the cradle of the newborn poet, thus imprinting on him the idea of Christ

as a role-model for the poet himself. Lines 7-12 may then be read as follows: now dead ("penny-eyed"), Christ whose wounds saved the world, prophet of an absent God ("Old cock from nowheres") and a virgin ("the heaven's egg") suffering the pain of incarnation in the half-way house of mutable life and in the end the unbuttoning of the flesh by death (l. 9), born from Mary's egg only to die on the one-legged cross like a cock standing on one leg -- this Christ came to the poet's cradle in the form of "a walking word," for Christ is the Word but equally importantly because the poet is his words and wants his words and imagination to have Christ's powers, the poet's own birth being a fall from unity into disunity ("that night of time") as well as a re-enactment of the original Nativity in the poet's own "Christward shelter" of the cradle or womb. In the sonnet's last two lines (the lack of quotation marks may reinforce the impression that the various characters of the sonnets are aspects of the single psyche of the narrator, the adult poet) Christ tells the poet what he (Christ) is: "I am the long world's gentleman, he said, / And share my bed with Capricorn and Cancer." Christ is saying that he is, by his incarnation, a part of the ongoing agony of the world of time ("the long world") but that he is also a part of eternity, sleeping with the two constellations that stand for the tropics, the two hemispheres that make up the world and through which the sun/Son progresses during the year. Being "female" influences astrologically and symbolizing the opposites of life-giving lust (the Goat) and death (the cancer Crab), the constellations signify Christ's ability to unify all opposites into one, a power desired by the self-divided poet as well.[50] Sonnet I, then, introduces the two central characters of the sequence -- Christ and the poet -- and puts forward not a case for orthodox Christianity but for the appropriation by the

poet of the example of Christ, the realization by the poet of his own inner "Christhood."

Sonnet II: The Infant Poet and the Poet's Desire to Escape from Fallen into Unfallen Nature. Undoubtedly, Sonnet II may be said to be a continuation of the autobiography of the poet which began in Sonnet I's description of the poet's conception and birth. General summary: in Sonnet II, the poet's early infancy is discussed and his future "fall" into self-division and estrangement from nature is outlined; and, as in Sonnet I, the figure of Christ weaves in and out of the narrative, now fusing and now separating from that of the poet, but always providing the final model of achieved power over opposites and over fallen nature that the growing poet wishes to take for his own. Lines 1-6: these lines discuss the poet's infancy. If the poet concluded "If I were tickled by the rub of love" with the assertion "Man be my metaphor," here he despairs of his poetic powers -- "Death is all metaphors, shape in one history." The inclusion of "metaphors" and "shape" in this line indicates that Thomas is here concerned with the problem of "literalism" as outlined in Chapter III. When words and things are separate so that the poet can evoke an image of a thing only indirectly by metaphor, he is admitting the breakdown of what Frye calls the world of total identity where all is a metaphor for all into a world of division. Metaphor implies unlikeness, and unlikeness implies, ultimately, a falling away from Oneness. Lines 2-14 of Sonnet II begin the long history of the poet's experience of division from nature and self-division within his own psyche. Although lines 2-6 may be construed as a description of the early years of Christ's life, his nurturing by Mary (the pelican), the fiery announcement of his birth by the Star of Bethlehem (l. 6), and followed, in lines 7-10 by a des-

cription of his Ascension, these same lines seem primarily concerned with the simultaneous development of the poet as a child. Tindall reads Sonnet II as an extension of Sonnet I (ll. 3-6), the growing child's Freudian displacement of his aging father as the dominant potent male (RG 130-31). These lines (II, 2-6), however, are mainly a highly condensed account of the child's early oneness with nature, the breaking of that oneness into disunity, and the subsequent sexual/poetic quest for new unity. Line 2 summarizes my last remark, the older form for the verb in the third person singular ("sucketh") indicating an ancient maternal connection of child and nature that now gives way to a fiery quest ("shooting up") towards the stars. Lines 3-4 elaborate this idea in the image of the cosmos (more specifically, the Milky Way) as a maternal pelican whose ducts are planets in their circling orbits and whose nurturing substance is blood ("an artery"). As the pelican is also a traditional symbol of Christ, we have in this image a rather complex picture of a hermaphrodite saviour-and-mother figure coterminous with the universe itself, the figure's blood-suckling of the child being symbolic of the sacramental nature of the child's relation to the world. But the pelican "weans" the child, just as every Romantic child grows up into self-consciousness and estrangement. And, as a result, the child, product of the quick ejaculation into the womb (l. 5), begins his long quest for reunification by the common means of sexual reproduction, and, simultaneously, the uncommon means of poetic creation ("a long stick = phallus/pen). Like Meleager, whose life was only as long as a burning stick, the burning stick of line 6 is the fiery, self-consuming Romantic poet of popular tradition. Lines 7-10 illustrate Blake's aphorism, quoted approvingly by Thomas, that without contraries is no progression. In a simultaneous description of Christ's

redeeming death and ascension and the poet's task of reconciling opposites by imagination, Thomas associates the poet and Christ in line 8 where "You" can be either creator while "cavern" and "black stairs" are the poet's upper room in Swansea or else heaven and the dark stairs up to that room or the vastness of outer space. In either case, a reconciliation of opposites is desired. A ladder of opposites is constructed, its vertical rungs being Adam's heaven-aspiring bones and its fallen horizontals Abaddon's cross-bones (= the Cross). Both Christ and poet, by building a ladder of opposites, steeled by their experience of estrangement, can "Jacob to the stars." Punning sexually on "jack up," Thomas reminds us of the organic and powerful sexual nature of the poetic process as he sees it. That "the stars" represent unfallen nature (Thomas's "Eden" of psychic wholeness) is clear in lines 11-14. There, the progression by opposites of lines 7-10 is confronted by yet another opposite, the "hollow agent." This agent's identity has spawned much critical speculation but no definite clues seem to give weight to any particular interpretation. One can only say that the image is one of action (agent) that is a personified functionary (agent) for some power whose nature is one of loss, negation (death, time, evil?). The only guess that seems wrong is that the agent is Christ speaking to the poet. The poet and Christ, having been identified throughout, remain so in these lines. In reference to Christ, these lines say that his sacrifice was futile, that at his death he failed to disentangle himself from death and the changeable material world. In reference to the poet's childhood attitude toward nature, the lines say that following an early sense of sacramental unity with a maternal cosmos, the child fell into disunity (ll. 1-4), sought to regain unity by building a ladder of opposites to rise up into unfallen nature (ll. 5-10), but that

now, far from being a creator in a divinely ordered nature whose creator numbers the hairs of the head, the child is entangled forever in the particularities of fallen nature (l. 11). Lines 13-16 are a marvelously effective simultaneous description of outer and inner worlds. First, these lines tell the poet's desire to rise up from fallen nature ("these groundworks") into upper nature ("a pavement"), a desire frustrated by his endless entanglement in the mutability of lower nature (l. 14). Secondly, these lines tell of the efforts of the psyche to rise above its habitual self (the groundworks) to break up into Edenic consciousness (the pavement), efforts thwarted by the psyche's self-division (l. 14). Thomas's linking of external image with internal process is clear not only in the phrase "hemlock-headed" (hemlock = poisonous yet evergreen) but in the phrase "wood of weathers," "wood" being a favorite term for the hair-forested head and "weathers" an even more favorite term to describe inner, psychological change that may parallel external change in nature (cf. P 178). Sonnet II, then, is an outline of the Romantic myth. The chief Romantic problem having been presented, Thomas turns next to the child's long development into the full-fledged Romantic poet of Sonnet X.

Sonnet III: The Child's Sexual Inheritance and Future History, Adam to Apocalypse. Sonnet III seeks out the origins of the "fall" into division and thereby defines the role of the Christ-poet composite in overcoming that division. General summary: Adam's fall from paradise necessitated Christ's sacrificial entrance into history (ll. 1-6) and/or the poet's childhood unity with nature gave way to a sense of deathliness in nature and dark sexual process (ll. 1-6); as a result, in both cases, Christ and the poet as incarnate powers engaged in battle with the forces of decay, and, by the theory of progression through

opposites (cf. Sonnet II), were able to link natural regeneration (spring) to the more permanent springs of Christian salvation and/or the Romantic apocalypse of imagination (ll. 7-14). Lines 1-6 may first be read as a history of the reasons for the necessity of Christ's incarnation. Christ the lamb was born (l. 1) and suffered (l. 2) "three dead seasons" (= the three decades before his ministry, the three crosses on Golgotha's "climbing grave," the three days in the tomb) for the reasons presented in lines 4-6. One of the most complex passages in the sequence, any interpretation of lines 4-6 depends upon the identification of "Adam's wether." Critics even disagree on whether the "wether" of old male sheep who leads a flock is, by definition, castrated or not. The general sense of lines 4-6 seems to be that if Adam is considered to be the wether to his progeny ("the flock of horns"), his sexual sin with Eve after the fall was the action that caused ("horned down") Golgotha ("skullfoot" = the "place of skulls" at Christ's and the cross's foot) and, earlier, the promise that the serpent's head would be bruised by Eve's descendents ("the skull of toes").[51] Adam, cuckolded by the serpent in Eden (l. 4), the "butt" of a cosmic joke, experienced the cosmos-wracking loss of Eden which paralleled Christ's action in Gesthemane and at the ninth hour (l. 6). This is the Christian reading. Simultaneously, lines 1-6 describe the poet's birth, short sojourn in the Eden of childhood, and "fall" into adulthood as a result of sexual awakening. Briefly, lines 1-2 describe the poet's pastoral childhood as a newborn lamb followed by three darker seasons of growth. Exasperatingly, these same lines also describe the poet as foetus in the womb, knees knocking to exit that "climbing grave" wherein he spends the "three dead seasons" of a nine months' pregnancy. A clue to one of the meanings of lines 1-2 derives from the fact that line 1 was lifted from

Poem Twenty-Eight in the February 1933 Notebook, a poem that is an early attempt to write an autobiography of the poet as poet where the "three dead seasons" after childhood are those of the poet as boy, young man, lover, the final stage being that of "the poet" or artist (N 198). This self-borrowing helps confirm the view that Sonnet III, as Sonnets I and II, is a stage in the poet's as well as Christ's life history. Lines 4-6 describe stage four (the lover) as the sexually awakened boy's superceding of his father (now impotent, "Adam's wether") who once was the "butt" whose phallic "serpent" mounted the poet's mother and entered the convulsing womb at the fertile time of the poet's own conception (l. 6). In either reading of lines 1-6, unity has given way to division; in lines 7-14, Christ's compensatory sacrifice becomes a model for the budding young poet's own hoped-for powers. Briefly, the Christian reading of lines 7-14 is as follows: I, Christ, vaulting from the tomb, my powerful-as-a-phallus body taken from my father's ancient thighs (ll. 7-8), come back to life like Rip Van Winkle, from the cradle of eternity (l. 9), I suffered my incarnation (l. 10); and, as all progression towards unity is by a dialectic of opposites, I and the black ram Satan (the "antipodes"), sole survivor of his crew (ll. 11-12), climbed toward eternity on the ladder of opposites of Sonnet II bringing spring to both hemispheres, Capricorn and Cancer (ll. 13-14). Reading lines 7-14 as poetic autobiography, one derives a similar interpretation as the Poet-Christ fusion in Sonnet III is almost total. King of womb and tomb as well as randy young dog ("Rip of the vaults"), the poet's penis, out of mother's womb (ll. 7-8) will one day enter both his lover's womb and the death-infested cycles of generation (ll. 9-10), a dark incarnation. Awakening sexually from the long sleep of childhood as Rip Van Winkle awoke from his twenty years' nap, the poet

identifies with Irving's tame example of a Romantic outlaw: lover of nature, dogs, child-like in temperament exile from societal and marital bonds, who enters for a time the world of vision and myth. Rip Van Winkle is the first of several outcast figures that are present in the sonnets as symbols of the state of the poet. In lines 11-14, the phallic poet combines with the "black ram" (impotent age as in Thomas's late poem "Lament") in a dialectic of opposites ("antipodes") that form the "ladder" of "weathering" (inner/outer) events that leads to new unity, the double chiming of spring. The spring lamb of line 1 (the child's Edenic consciousness), the fall into generation and its division (11. 2-13), and the arrival of a double spring (inner/outer redemption of self/world) is an exact enactment of the phases of the Romantic myth, here made more powerful because Thomas's technique of simultaneous presentation, by giving a "double image" of Christian and Romantic readings, imitates the very act of "displacement" that gives to the Romantic myth its power as the most radical possible version of Protestantism. Sonnet IV is a logical extension of Sonnet III, an investigation of the nature of the unifying power of Christ and the Poet.

Sonnet IV: Reason versus Love -- Christ's Nativity and the Poet as an Older Child in His Questioning Phase. Unlike the previous sonnet, Sonnet IV contains almost no image that demands a Christian interpretation as its primary one. Although a Christian reading is possible, the primary concern is the growth of the poet into a later phase of childhood where his incessant questioning indicates a precocious facility for language that will later blossom into mature poetry. General summary: a speaker asks a series of questions (11. 1-8); secondly, after a comment to the person addressed on the futility of deceptive answers (11. 9-10), the speaker juxtaposes the rational questioning of lines 1-8 to

a brief discussion of love and art (photography) that concludes the sonnet. In the intriguing but ultimately overstrained Christian reading by Kleinman, the questions (ll. 1-6) are asked by newspaper reporters to the newborn Christ child, the "whiz kid," the parenthetical asides being Christ's. The later questions and remarks (ll. 7-10) are the reporters' crude insinuations that Mary's claims to have been impregnated by God are a fraud and should have caused her to hide her pregnancy in shame. Lines 11-14 are then seen as a group portrait of the holy family as arranged by the reporters, although the photograph they take ends up on the cutting-room floor.[52] To this one may add the explication of the difficult line 5 by Evans and Hardy: the "burning gentry" are Satan and his crew who were defeated by a "sixth of wind" because Christ, one third of the trinity, used one half of his power (= 1/6) to defeat Satan in the battle for heaven.[53] Although a Christian reading will be tolerated by the text, the autobiographical level of narrative seems dominant throughout. In the autobiographical reading, lines 1-10 show the young Romantic poet's first awareness of the creative word. The questions in lines 1-3 (see WDT 227-29 for a detailed analysis of each question) all deal with creativity and/or language (metre/genesis/ gender /‾sexual and grammatical‾/ / shape/echo) and are all as well the questions of an extremely linguistically precocious young boy. Also, by their very nature, these questions demonstrate the limits of reason and the Romantic's striving for the ineffable and the linguistically unformulatable experience. There is also present a groping towards words and the things of generation. Line 4 means that the poet's mother (her womb her wound) has "ssh'd" him for asking too many questions; similarly, line 6 says that the strait-laced father sees the boy's questions as deformed ("hunchbacks" = the ? shape of question marks?),

the image of the hunchback being another of the poem's outcast figures. Lines 7-10 are the sexually awakening boy's self-knowingly teasing questions to his mother: has another man besides father been in your womb's acres? Do you hide from or deny to father your womb-as-tomb ("the shroud") where once I was. A visionary, the poet, in lines 11-14, discovers the problem of unity and disunity in terms of pre-natal life (ordered by love) and post-natal life (ordered by rationality). In images drawn from photography (thus, art), the poet says (ll. 11-13) that <u>love is</u> (= "Love's") desirable because equivalent to the sense of undivided unity enjoyed by the embryo ("mushroom features") in the food-providing womb ("the bread-sided field"). That womb was a perfect fusion nature and art, a "well of pictures" that were endless self-reflections of the child and love "by night" (before self-consciousness after birth). Such pictures were "stills," not <u>moving</u> pictures in the world of change. Now however (l. 14), the born child, like the boy in Wordsworth's Intimations Ode that feels the prison-house of the world close upon him, is "thrown back" (cast back / reflected) on the "cutting flood" of the world (a giant cutting-room where love's photos are cast to the floor). Under the hot lamp of reason ("arc-lamped"), love withers, unless one realizes that in the hidden allusions to Noah ("arc" = ark; flood = the Flood) in line 14 Thomas is reminding us of God's covenant of love with Noah. A figure of the poet in "Author's Prologue," Thomas's last finished poem, Noah, in his veiled presence here, forecasts the final evolution of Thomas into the poet of love and the creative word, searching after the loving unity symbolized by the pre-natal life of the womb, threatened, as here, by a reductive rationality that accompanies the growing child's sense of estrangement upon the "cutting flood" of the world (which is also, of course, the

cutting flood of the womb's water bag and about-to-be-cut umbilicus). Having become increasingly aware of his tool of imagination, the creative word, and love, the young poet turns in the zany and obscure Sonnet V to a scrutiny of his inherited answer to all questions: orthodox Christianity.

Sonnet V: The Young Poet's Rejection of Orthodoxy and Subsequent Quest on the Uncharted Waters of World and Mind. Of all the sonnets in the Altarwise sequence, Sonnet V is the most obscure. No critic to date has come forth with an interpretation that satisfactorily explains in any detail the images in this sonnet (especially lines 7-14). Nevertheless, Sonnet V is an extremely important sonnet, one of a "cluster" with Sonnets VI and VII, originally the last three sonnets of the sequence as published in 1935. Sonnet IV dealt with the young poet's growing awareness of language and the power of love to forge unity from diversity; Sonnets VI and VII deal in greater detail with the older poet's heretofore ambiguous attitude toward Christianity whose "myth" he seems to draw on simply as a means of defining personal experience. General summary: institutionalized Christianity has become a self-serving institution which perverts Christ's true nature and cheats its members with false dogma (ll. 1-5); thus, I (the poet) left the church to search for my own version of Adam's paradise (l. 6) but what I found initially was that I was cast forth on a phantasmagoric quest in a weird, natural-supernatural landscape, an exile in the sea of my own experience with no inherited cosmology to order my perceptions (ll. 7-14). Lines 1-5: as critics point out, these lines are a raucously irreverent depiction of Christian mysteries in the metaphor of a B-rate western movie. Autobiographically, these lines represent the poet's boyhood adoption of imaginary roles -- cowboys and Christians here -- on his way

toward developing his major persona as the Poet. More importantly, these lines indicate the poet's dissatisfaction with institutional Christianity which appears here as a card game in which the cheating card sharps Gabriel and "Jesu" deal out the fake but winning ("trumped up") cards of a poxy Christ crucified with stigmata ("the king of spots"), two Thieves whose sexual potency is curbed by condoms ("the sheath-decked jacks") and a Mary of an inconstant heart ("queen with a shuffled heart"). Such is Annunciation- and Doomsday-announcing Gabriel's game reports "the fake gentleman" who, as alcoholic of religious matters, is apparently hungover to the point of defecting to Satan's party ("in suit of spades / Black-tongued"). This perfectly describes Thomas's self-consciously atheistic father, also a heavy drinker, and the first member of his family to achieve a precarious gentility as a schoolmaster. His burlesque tone an indication of his distance from orthodoxy, the poet moves from that orthodoxy (ll. 1-5) to the phantasmagoric quest for new order (ll. 7-14) by the one-sentence-long, enigmatic line 6: "Rose my Byzantine Adam in the night." Interpreted by critics as a reference to the boy's first experience of erection or else the lure of eastern religion, the line seems also to mean that the poet, deprived of the old Christian cosmology that defined his old self ("in the night"), now finds some deeper, truer, non-Christian self emerging to search out its own Edenic origins (Byzantine = East, Eden?). The poet's Adamic self must find its own way back to paradise. Since Thomas loved Yeats, "Byzantine" may echo Byzantium, city of art created by imagination; if so, then "Byzantine Adam" may be the poet's imagination, freed from religion, beginning the long voyage toward its own apocalypse in Sonnet X. In any case, lines 7-14 which follow, whatever their particular meaning image by image, represent the poet's fall into division as a

result of the loss of the old Christian cosmology in lines 1-5. These final lines may be read simply as a record of the poet's disoriented attitude toward external and internal events, a futile attempt to integrate the warring male and female elements in his family (mother/father) and his own psyche (RG 134-36), or, in a strict Christian interpretation, they may be read as Adam's experience of the fall from paradise with lines 1-5 read as an idiosyncratic but not essentially unorthodox recounting of the Annunciation.[54] To me, the lines represent the transitional phase between the old Christian order which the poet has left and the new order based on the poet's assumption of the role of Christ which is the story of Sonnets VI-X. Line 7 is adapted from Poem Seventeen in the August Notebook (N 242), a poem that recounts the poet's fall into division and subsequent adoption of his own Christhood through the "faith" of the imagination. A Romantic exile, the poet identifies himself in these lines with various outcasts and questers: Ishmael (the Bible's and Melville's), Jonah, fallen Adam, Virgil's Aeneas. Having forfeited the blood of Christian sacrament (l. 7), he assuages his hunger on the "milky mushrooms" (l. 8) of a maternal nature or the Milky Way, is engulfed by his guilt at the rejection of religious authority which is likened to the Flood (l. 9), the whale sent by God to swallow (Jonah (l. 10), or, in a complex scene, the crucifixion ("Pin-legged on pole-hills"), thereafter of the renegade, sea-voyaging poet ("salt Adam") on the cross made of a "frozen angel" (Dante's Satan frozen in the final circle of Hell?) and a Satanic Madonna and/or femme fatale ("a black medusa," also a poisonous sea creature) in cold northern seas where a figure of natural prophecy or else the prophecy of Creusa to Aeneas, both of which are analogous to what the estranged Romantic poet fears here -- the necessary quest for

a new dispensation to replace the old Christian one rejected in lines 1-5. Some critical attention has been paid to the obvious and several less obvious (and less certain) references in lines 7-14 to Moby-Dick: Ishmael, Moby, the "whiteness of the whale" chapter.[55] My own addition to his line of inquiry is to suggest that, in addition to Ishmael, Jonah, Adam, and Aeneas, another outcast and/or quester figure lurking among these lines is Melville's famous Satanic hero, Captain Ahab, who, like the hero of lines 7-14, falls on Ishmael's plain (the ocean), who died on milky white Moby in Asian seas, who was crucified ("cross-stroked") on the whale and who certainly heard the siren song (l. 14) of the Romantic's self-assertive quest after final knowledge and power over nature. In any case, line 14 ends the account of this mad voyage ambiguously with its possible meanings. The voyaging poet may be tempted by the siren-song of orthodoxy and by the comforting figure of Mary; or, the sirens (complex of anima, art, love of the beautiful beyond death) represent Romantic values that arise out of the old Christian dispensation, "our lady's sea-straw," representing Mary's bed in Bethlehem, or, more likely, a conflation of the Virgin and sea-born Aphrodite (Mary's straw bed equivalent to Aphrodite's sea-bed in the image of "sea-straw"). Thus, the final line seems a conjuration of the Romantic poet's creative faculty, the anima, counterbalanced by the opposing figure of the fatal sirens, the voyaging poet's double-natured source of his own power as he goes forth to forge his own relation to the world and his own mental faculties.

Sonnet VI: The Young Poet's Adolescent Initiation into the Mysteries of Poetry and Sex. Still churning about in the fantastic seas of Sonnet VI, the young poet comes to see the integrated processes of poetic and sexual creation as the avenues by which his own self-redeeming Christ-

hood may be obtained. General summary: beginning in the womb or in his seacliff room at No. 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, the poet begins the process of poetic creation and the breaking down of the barrier between "word" and "thing" (ll. 1-4); by doing so, the poet discovers that the power of love is released into the world thus purifying his own perceptions and rendering harmless to him all embodiments of the male and female principles which are integrated in poetry and love (ll. 7-10); finally, the young poet begins to write his early poems -- the poems of the Notebooks -- which are predominantly poems about the fall into self-division but which also develop the concurrent theme, fully realized in Altarwise, of the poet as his own Christ (ll. 11-14). Lines 1-4: poetic and sexual creation begin simultaneously in the womb ("the tide-traced crater") in which the poet is a "cartoon" (preliminary sketch) or on which the poet-foetus draws cartoons. As the womb is a volcanic crater, the poet draws "by lava's light" and is "tallow-eyed," both images of sexual fertility and the eruptive, self-consuming Romantic theory of expressivism. Desiring the unity of inner word and outer thing, the poet splits "oyster vowels" (close-mouthed, unuttered womb-words), expresses "sea silence" by means of his writer's candle ("a wick of words," also phallic), and writes these word-things down in the womb's "book of water," an appropriate sort of blank book for the poet whose lifelong model and friendly rival was Keats ("Here lies one whose name was writ in water"). As God's Word became the face of waters, so the poet's words, by the same kind of imaginative action, create out of the primeval inner and outer landscapes of womb, volcanic crater, water, lava, and sea. Lines 5-10: such an organic-sexual mode of poetic creation as detailed in lines 1-4 releases the power of love into the inner and outer worlds. Various embodiments of the male and female aspects of the

mind or outer world actually invite the poet to purify their senses as the poet, by linking word to outer thing, has purified his own. Addressed as "cock" and "love," the poet transforms the "black medusa" of Sonnet V (here, after the poet's word-thing linkage of lines 1-4, called "medusa's scripture") who offers up her "sea eye" (perceiver of the sea of generation and change).[56] Next, he transforms the "pinhilled nettle," another dangerous sea creature, one with male features, that in its "forked tongue" and in its location on Golgotha (the "pinhilled" place of nails and crosses) represents the perverted Christ of orthodoxy that the poet's love here releases in his Blakean form. The "stinging siren's eye" (= death, the false love of sex or art as a narcissistic or death-inducing experience) is also plucked out by "love." Overcoming a threat to his freewheeling creativity with phallus and pen by the old, withdrawn authoritarian god of Welsh Puritanism ("Old cock from nowheres") who "lopped the minstrel tongue" of the young minstrel poet, the poet goes on with the concurrent ejaculations of sperm and poem: "Till tallow I blew from the wax's tower / The fats or midnight when the salt was singing" (ll. 9-10). Lines 11-14: the poet as Adam, searching for his lost paradise through sexual love and poetry, is "time's joker," highest card that can trump the card-sharps of orthodoxy from Sonnet V, Jesu and Gabriel, writes his early poems of division (RG 137), a creative process that, sexually, has Adam mounting a witch to spell out the seas of generation, the "evil index" of the book of waters, but that also, in revealing his dark muse as a "witch of cardboard" recalls the fact that Thomas is known to have written out his early stories (such as "The School for Witches") on pieces of cardboard so that he could see the story as an organic whole. The final two lines describe the love conversion of "the bagpipe-breasted ladies,"

who have been described as fates, muses, sirens, poetic midwives (animae), or furies. Whatever they are, they are powerful and loudly pneumatic female influences that live in the deadweed of the sea as the sirens in Sonnet V (l. 14) live in the sea-straw of Aphrodite's sea-manger. In the action of the final line wherein the ladies "blew out the blood gauze through the wound of manwax" one may find (1) a description of the loss of the maidenhead caused by the womb-wounding phallus whose seed is the wax of man or (2) a description of the powerful forces of the poet's anima, located in the sea of the subconscious mind up through whose surface's deadweed they float to release their power that enables the poet to create poems of redeeming love on the model of Christ's crucifixion. That is, the expressivist Romantic poet's poem is a "wound" that shed the "blood gauze" (i.e., blood that bandages wounds like gauze) of redeeming love, the produce of "manwax," the wax from the candles by which the poet writes his phallus-powered poems. A grotesque image it may be, yet the poet's Romantic displacement of Christ into the secular mode of poetic (and also sexual) creation seems clear. Sonnet VII, closely related to Sonnet VI, and originally the final sonnet in the sequence, contrasts the poet's newfound sacramental view of nature with the poet's greatest enemy, time.

Sonnet VII: The Young Poet and the Problem of the Creative Word versus Time. The Christ-like nature of the poet's self-sacrificing, expressivist act having been established, Thomas proceeds in Sonnet VII to examine the young poet's first attempts to write poems that unite language and nature as sacrament. General summary: let language and nature be made one and let the poet's poems reflect the "biblical rhythm" of glory, ruin, and restoration now displaced into a secular context (ll. 1-5); let those be damned who refuse to believe that such

a sacramental vision of nature is possible (l. 6); nevertheless, my perverse anima only inspires me to write of the theme of time that destroys the imagination and its creations (ll. 7-10); in fact, time itself is a poet printing his poems on all living things (ll. 11-14). This generally clear sonnet needs little elaboration. Christian ideas resurface in this poem but are so heavily qualified by the poet's clear attitude toward orthodoxy in Sonnet V and his assumption of his own Christhood in Sonnet VI that these ideas should be understood as referring to the process of poetic creation. In that process, the poet's sacramental language and nature become one: "the Lord's Prayer" on a "grain of rice" (rice paper?) and a strange "Bible-leaved" entity that links words and things in the phases of creation ("the written woods" and "Genesis in the root"), fall ("a rocking alphabet"), and redemption ("the scarecrow word" of the poet-Christ on the cross of Sonnet VI, ll.lll. 13-14). The end result is a perfect imaginative fusion of poetic language and a pantheistic nature: "one light's language in the book of trees." A confident young poet at this point, young Thomas condemns all those who would deny that as a poet he can accomplish the task" (l. 6). The "wind-turned statement" is the poet's words, made of the inspired breath of imagination, that are turned into wind (a correspondent breeze) even as they articulate that very desire that inner speech and outer phenomena become one. But the young poet has met his match against Time (ll. 7-14), a musician whose muses are the sirens of Sonnets V and VI. These sirens defeat the poet who would ring out the music of the spheres in a new cosmology ("bell-voiced Adam"), now "out of magic" as imagination fails to stop the ruthless progress of time that destroys imagination's products and relationships. Since the creation, "time" and "magic" have warred over the

"milk" of the created world (l. 10), but now the powers of the muse are given to time (l. 11), time's music governing all from head to toe or palace to barn in Bethlehem ("bald pavilions" to "the house of bread," l. 12). Like a recording machine, time "tracks" its own tune in all created things ("the sound of shape"), replacing the poet's fusion of creative word and thing with its own musical notation imprinted by its tuneful hand, "the ringing handprint," that governs female and male, spring fruition and icy winter death, the "rose" and "icicle" (l. 14). Like Wordsworth, Thomas discovers visionary dreariness, "bell-voiced Adam out of magic," his youthful poems of sacramental nature darkening into poems of grim "process" untransformable by imaginative action. In addition, Matthew Hodgart notes on this sonnet that this idea that "the imagination can only be embodied in the productions of time, but /that/ time destroys what it makes, /is/ a Keatsian notion."[57] Unsatisfied with an ending whose tone is one of resignation, Thomas added three final sonnets to the Altarwise sequence. Vernon Watkins characterized these three additional sonnets as the sonnets "on the Crucifixion, Egyptian burial, and the Resurrection" (LVW 13). Still essentially concerned not with Christianity or Egyptology but with the poet's own imaginative powers that these traditions help evoke, Thomas presents us with a dramatic enactment of the Romantic poet's apotheosis and the final apocalypse of imagination.

Sonnet VIII: The Poet Achieves His Own Christhood. Christian myth and Romantic poetics are fused in what most critics see as the climactic sonnet of the sequence. A lucid simultaneous presentation (or should we now say, single event?) of Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha and what Peter Revell aptly calls the poet's "self-immolation

in the agonies of the imagination," Sonnet VIII describes the ultimate Romantic epiphany when the poet's imagination unites itself with a redeemed external world to which it is linked by a love that, for once, transcends the cycles of sex. General summary: Christ and the Poet are crucified to save the world, mourned by Mary/nature (ll. 1-6); pre-ordained by Christian and Romantic destinies, Christ and the Poet die in order to fulfill a covenant of love with the world (ll. 7-10); finally, in the "moment" of the Crucifixion and Romantic epiphany, Christ and the Poet end the domination of time, and thus of sexual process, and restore unity of being in which heaven, the child, and love (l. 14) are one. Lines 1-6: efforts to read this sonnet as if spoken by Mary are weak because "God's Mary" seems an appositive for the wounded womb of nature, not for the speaker of line 1-3. Christ on Golgotha and the poet on the wonder-inspiring mountain both pickle time and thus defeat it by their "deaths"; weeping tears of blood for their crown of thorns (cf. Thomas who "shed the syllabic blood" in "Especially when the October wind"). Christ's Mary who is God's and equally is Romantic maternal nature is united to Christ and the world-embracing poet ("the world's my wound") whose imagination sheds redeeming love. Both Mary and mother nature mourn for their redeemer's death (ll. 5-6). Lines 7-10: addressing Christ, the similarly crucified poet explains the nature of their dual sacrifices as a matter of linking self and world. The poet tells Christ that Christ's death was predestined by God ("heaven-driven"), each angle of the sky a part of the nails that drove through Christ's flesh at the four points of the compass. Christ thus fulfilled Noah's rainbow covenant. At the same time, the poet may be discussing his own sacrificial act. In that case, "Jack Christ" is in apposition to "sky" (= upper nature) into which the poet, by his

sacrifice, vaults the lower nature of the untransformed daily world (now "the snail-waked world"). Self and world are one in a covenant of love symbolized by the outpouring of the rainbow from the poet's nipple (Romantic expressivism!) from "pole to pole" (the self's head to toe and the world's North to South Poles). Christ's posture on the cross is the right posture for all Romantic poets who assume "each minstrel angle" of the cross. That the phrase "my nipples" cannot be spoken by "Jack Christ" reinforces the argument that the sacrifice of Christ and that of the poet are both present here. Lines 11-14: having united with Mary/nature and having female breasts whose milk is a covenantal rainbow, the androgynous Christ and the poet, in a crucial moment of creative activity, put an end to the world of division beginning with sexual opposites -- "Unsex the skeleton this mountain minute." Both healers of wounds (l. 11), both put an end to time (l. 13) and restore the twin paradises of the Christian heaven and the Romantic's upper nature, a heaven inhabited by the Romantic child, who is at one with the unified sensibility of the poet of love through whose "heartbeat" the children pass into the nature-heaven as through the womb. Revell calls this sonnet "the apotheosis of the poet."[58] With its conclusion, Thomas's displacement of the Christian myth into Romantic terms is complete. Sonnet IX addresses problems that the poet will encounter in the fulfillment of his role as defined in Sonnet VIII.

Sonnet IX: Desert Burial as Symbol of the Tribulations of the Poet's Poems of Redemption: Publishers, Critics, and the Ravages of Time. Abruptly switching from Christian to Egyptian myth (firm evidence that the poet's autobiography is primary in the sequence as a whole), Thomas explores the ill fate of the orthodox "version" of Christ and the fate of his own poems in the hands of the critics.

General summary: from ancient written records we know of the intricate embalming procedures by which the Egyptians sought to preserve royalty for their journey into eternity (ll. 1-6); this false and dessicated form of resurrection, parallel to the "mummification" of the poet's poems in printing, is discovered by archaeologists/literary critics whose dry, objective approach can only see death in the tombs of pyramid and poembook (ll. 7-10); let the crucified Christ and the Poet be placed in a desert pyramid and adorn themselves with symbols of religious and poetic power as well as the dead themselves whom the two redeemers, as voyagers toward a final spiritual home, take upon themselves in order to save (ll. 11-14). Lines 1-6: Tindall (RG 140-42) and Revell have provided ingenious parallels between the first six lines' description of ancient writing and embalming and the modern process of printing poems.[59] However valid these guesses may be, they do suggest that language and death are intertwined in this sonnet of burial rather than the association of the world of words and of life as in Sonnets VI and VIII. That Christ's burial is a temporary return to Egyptian captivity, the culture of the dead, is clear, but why should the printing of the poet's poems also be a kind of burial? Line 7, an ironic statement, prepares us to read lines 8-10 to mean that archaeologists (Egyptian), biblical scholars (Christian), and literary critics (poetics) who melt into a single false-faced image, "the mask of scholars," in their coldly rational investigation of their various artifacts see only death and the "gold" they might make from their studies. Thomas's distrust of critics is probably at work here. The "long gentleman" who is Christ and the Poet suffers the "dust and furies" of musty library shelves and the parasitical self-interest of possessive misinterpreters -- the clergy and the critics. Lines 11-14

express the hero's wish to remain hidden with the dead from the persecutors of Christ and Poet in Christian and academic orthodoxy (ll. 11-12); meanwhile, with "stones and odyssey" (l. 13; amulets / the stone-hewn artifact of the poem) for "ash" (death) and "garland" (poetic achievment) the Redeemer, through whose living heartbeat the children flowed in Sonnet VIII, now is the hanging man with "rivers of the dead around my neck" as he descends to the underworld of death and the failure of imagination. Since these rivers (Styx, Nile) are in his neck, then we have an extension of Thomas's earlier paradigm of the inner quest for psychic wholeness as involving a descent into the inner hell of the self. Having escaped the ravages of institutionalized religion and academic criticism that follows the printing of poems, Christ and the Poet end their voyage in Sonnet X where the resurrection of Jesus the Imagination prophesies the final apocalypse and the restoration of Edenic consciousness.

Sonnet X: The Poet's Understanding of the Nature of His Poetry, Quest and Final Fate. The poet commands ("Let . . .") his own usurpation of the role of the orthodox Christ and prophesies a final restoration of nature and the self to their Edenic states by the reconciliation of all opposites. General summary: let the poet who has displaced Christian myth into a secular, poetic context (ll. 1-3) thus unite the creative word to nature which that word redeems by using and shaping any myth to suit its own purposes (ll. 4-6). Let Simon Peter, first Pope and founder of the orthodox church, lean out from heaven to ask Christ or Aphrodite (the "tall fish" of line 8) what phallic poet this is who has caused Eden to rise out of the waters of nature and of mind (ll. 7-10); whatever its nature, may that garden with its two trees rise up forever on Judgment Day, its central tree (phallus, cross, world-tree) a whole made up of various opposites: good and evil, male and female, fruition

and decay, the self (phallus) and the world (the world-tree) and others (ll. 11-14). A few difficult local obscurities do not greatly harm a generally clear sonnet whose purpose is to sum up the poet's knowledge of his own role and to forecast the ultimate unfolding of his art. Lines 1-3: the "tale's sailor" is the questing poet (also: sail's tailor who stitched together these ten sonnets) who is a sailor "from" (away from) a "Christian voyage" because his poems are displacements of Christian ideas; thus, concerned with the relation of self and world ("atlaswise"), he rejects the "dummy bay" where voyaging Christians come to rest, though his adaptation of Christian myth to his own purposes means that he stays only "half-way off" the Christian bay. The message of institutionalized religion, "time's ship-wracked gospel," is appropriated by the poet for his opposites-balancing "world" of poetry ("the globe I balance").[60] Lines 4-6: the stationary harbors of orthodox belief shall, by displacement, become "winged harbours" flying towards the poet's saving word ("the blown word" because created like blown glass, sent out into the world by breath, and blown from God's Word into the secular words of the poet). The ancient believers, fanatically blind and hardheaded as furies or harpies ("the rockbirds' eyes"), shall see the union of nature and my words ("the seas I image") and shall watch me shuffle Christian and pagan traditions as I please to express my individualism (l.6, which conflates the Nativity and Crucifixion in "December's thorns" and again in "brow of holly" which also suggests pre-Christian tradition). Lines 7-10: if you do not think I shall bring off my Romantic assumption of my own Christhood, let Pope Peter the First, the fisherman, who is leaning out of heaven on a "quayrail" (pun on keys) of a rainbow, ask "the tall fish" Christ, whose religion swept westward out of the east, what new phallic poet

("rhubarb man") this is who has replaced that "sea-ghost" Christ the Fish with his own "flying garden." Recalling that Thomas called poems "flying fish," one may argue that this new Eden is made up of the poet's words and of visionary nature arising from its fallen form in the sea of generation. The only problem with this reading is the clause describing the action of the rhubarb man who "peeled in her foam-blue channel." What is the antecedent of "her"? If it is "the tall fish," then the fish can only be a hermaphroditic Christ (as in Sonnet VIII where his breasts give rainbows like milk) or else a female figure, possibly Aphrodite, arising from her foamy birth in the sea, a "sea-ghost" in the Christian era but restored to her rightful place by this poet of a sexually dynamic cosmos. Since Peter is more likely to address Christ than Aphrodite, I think the fish is Christ but the problem of "her" remains unsolved. Lines 11-14: this new Eden, as "green" (fertile, unifying, healing) as the first Eden and the first creation of the universe by the Word, diving in the sea of psyche and world, will rise up from below (as Frye says Romantic heavens tend to do) on the "day" of the total resolution of all opposites, its two towers (the trees of good and evil and of life as well as any pair of discrete things) resolved in the single "rude, red tree" (phallic, "rood," revolutionary "red," sacramentally red with Christ's and the poet's blood) in which the self-contained, phoenix poet's "nest of mercies" are, built by the cooperating masculine forces of fruition (phallic "worm" and poet's finger; RG 143) and decay (graveyard "worm") whose combined powers yield the feminine powers of the nest's "gold straws of venom," evil transformed into a permanent artifice of the good. Clark Emery rightly calls these final lines the poet's announcement of "the new concept of Paradise . . . /as/ an earthly paradise" (WDT 247).

With all of its awkwardness, obscurities, and even grotesqueries, Altarwise by Owl-light, written by a poet of twenty-one, is an heroic attempt to create a powerful "Romantic self" whose imaginative powers might bring about the realization of the redemption phase of the Romantic myth. A history of the young poet's "inner world" as well as a history of the poetic self's relation to the external world which it hopes to redeem, Altarwise marks the final fruition of the early poetry. But the apocalypse of imagination prophesied in Sonnet X did not occur. What could, or should, the young poet do next? This is the subject of Chapter V in which the poems of 1936-46 (The Map of Love and Deaths and Entrances) are examined.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]William York Tindall, "Burning and Crested Song," rev. of Collected Poems by Dylan Thomas, The American Scholar, 22 (Autumn, 1953), 487. Other critics concur with Tindall and adopt various reasons for finding three periods in Thomas. Elder Olson sees Thomas's work as falling into the periods of self-centeredness, concern for other particular individuals, and the expression of feelings of religious faith and love (The Poetry of Dylan Thomas, Chicago, 1954, p. 20). A. M. Reddington (Dylan Thomas: A Journey from Darkness to Light, Paulist Press, 1968, p. 30) and Louise Murdy (Sound and Sense in Dylan Thomas's Poetry, Mouton, 1966, p. 45) agree with Olson. William Moynihan designates these three periods as those of doubt, debate, and consent (The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas, Cornell, 1966, p. 129) and explains elsewhere that these periods correspond to the self's confrontation of a mechanistic universe of process, the encounter of the self with the "real" world (presumably the poems of marriage and war), and the salvation of the self through the praise of spiritualized landscapes ("Dylan Thomas' 'Hewn Voice'," TSLL, 1 [Autumn, 1959], 314). However, Walford Davies, Thomas's best current apologist, emphasizes two essential periods that shade into one another where most other critics find a "middle" phase. The earlier period, even including the marriage and war poems of 1936-45, is a period of divisiveness and conflict between the poet and the worlds he detects both within and without; the post-war poems represent "a largely unconscious movement towards the acceptance of a pre-lapsarian vision," a reintegration of the self and the landscape that seemed more threatening and less loving in the earlier "process" poems (Dylan Thomas, Univ. of Wales Press, 1972, pp. 33-34). In "The Poetry: An Introduction" delivered as a lecture at the 1974 Dylan Thomas Summer School, Swansea, Wales, Mr. Davies discussed Thomas's later poems in terms of the rediscovery of a sense of community (rural Wales) through memory, his early childhood defining his poetic self in its desire to achieve an Edenic consciousness (DTS). Davies rightly notes that the identification of self and nature in the earlier poems is on the cosmic scale, an identity that is as much an imprisonment of the isolated consciousness as it is a liberation of the self into a world congenial to its desires. Possibly Davies minimizes the difficulty Thomas experienced in developing these later poems, a difficulty that gave rise to the poems in the "middle" period whose awkwardnesses belie the search for new directions. Still, whether one sees the published volumes as falling into three periods or two, it seems clear that Thomas moved from a period of intense cosmic identification to a more relaxed, religious poetry set in particularized landscapes that are more separate from yet more deeply interpreted by the poet as observer or mediator.

[2]Actually, Thomas's work is highly subjective throughout, but in the later work pure self-assertion gives way to more complex attitudes. However, critics have generally followed Thomas's self-description of

his work as at first intensely subjective and later more objective. Jacob Korg, viewing Thomas as a mystic, makes the convincing point that Thomas needed to test out his early sense of cosmic identity on other living less ecstatic, even tragic lives in order to discover the limitations of his Whitmanesque assertions of Oneness. This turning from solitary communion to difficult relationships Korg describes as "a familiar Wordsworthian shift, from the introspective imagination of youth to encounters with people and external nature / wherein / visible realities rival cosmic vision as sources of truth" (Dylan Thomas, Twayne, 1965, pp. 96, 107). Critics have provided various formulations for the less than cosmic externalities that Thomas's poetic self encounters in the middle and later poems. Hoxie Fairchild lists as the "objectifying factors" Thomas's marriage, fatherhood, the Blitz, Leftist politics, remembered childhood landscapes (Trends, p. 380). Walford Davies describes the problem as "the establishment of a context" for the poetic self, a context that drew in the later poems on the literary tradition of the pastoral and on Thomas's own childhood experience in rural Wales (New Critical Essays, p. 156). To Fairchild and Davies, Ralph Maud adds the important fact that Thomas's work for the BBC as reader of his own and others' poetry and as a writer of filmscripts forced him to write more objectively and led eventually to a late decision to move from lyric poetry to drama (Under Milk Wood). (Entrances, p. 50). John Bayley, whose brief but significant essay on Thomas recognizes the poet's subject-object problem as Romantic, also sees the later poetry as "a return to tradition" and a solving of the problem of the isolated self: "Beginning in himself, Thomas's poetic apprehension, so absolute and so homogeneous, was beginning to turn outwards into the world of other human beings, seen as individuals going about their concerns" (The Romantic Survival, p. 227). This movement towards inclusiveness of that which exists in between the extremes of the self and the entire cosmos does not mean, however, that the poetic self is unimportant in the later poems. On the contrary, the later poems are a further search by the self for the origins of its own powers and its true spiritual home. George Woodcock, in an essay on Thomas and Wales, rightly views both the earlier and the later poetry as concerned with subjective and objective worlds. The difference, he thinks, lies in the direction of movement between those worlds: "It is an important sign of the direction of his development that, while in his early poems he was concerned with the elementary rhythms of bodily living and growth, and sought to externalize them into more universal symbols, later he has proceeded from the concrete and external world of nature to the illumination of his inner being" ("Dylan Thomas and the Welsh Environment," Arizona Quarterly, 10 / Winter, 1954 /, 298).

[3]Ralph Maud, "Dylan Thomas' Collected Poems: Chronology of Composition," PMLA, 76 (June, 1961), 292-97.

[4]The chronology of the poems outside the Notebooks may be determined by Maud's "Chronology" and Rolph's 1956 Bibliography (see Chapter I, n. 25) of all works by Thomas then known. Both Maud and Rolph rely on the dates of publication in poetry journals which usually followed the writing of the later poems by a year or less.

[5]The few exceptions are these: (a) Raymond Hogler, "Dylan Thomas: The Development of an Idiom," Anglo-Welsh Review, 21 (Summer and Winter,

1972), 113-23 and 102-14; (b) Ralph Maud's "Introduction" to Poet in the Making: The Notebooks of Dylan Thomas (see Chapter III, n. 89); and (c) Harry Williams, "Dylan Thomas' Poetry of Redemption: Its Blakean Beginnings" (see Chapter III, n. 67 and 92).

[6]The case for the "aesthetic ordering" of Thomas's poems is put forward by Daniel Jones in the introduction to his edition of Thomas's poems: "The Collected Poems of 1952 represents Thomas's own choice of content and form under the circumstances and at the time when he made that choice; for this reason, that book will remain significant in its own right" (P xiii). A TLS reviewer of Jones's edition complained that the enlargement and distortion of the ordering of Collected Poems was a disservice to Thomas's artistic intentions: "He called his own edition Collected Poems, not Complete Poems, and in the separate volumes published in his lifetime he was more interested, like all good poets, in making sure that the ordering of any volume should itself be aesthetically meaningful rather than merely recording the sequence of composition" (Rev. of Dylan Thomas: Early Prose Writings, ed. Walford Davies (Dent, 1971) and Dylan Thomas in Print, by Ralph Maud (Pittsburgh, 1970) TLS (3 March 1972), p. 254, col. 1. Such arguments in the case of Thomas, as pointed out in the text, are weakened by his own admission that the first two volumes have no such firm ordering and by our knowledge of the circumstances of the compilation of Twenty-Five Poems -- pressure from Thomas's editor, Victor Neuberg: "early in 1936 he / Neuberg / suggested that Thomas might collect together what poems he had written over the past year with a view to preparing a second book. Within a few days, Thomas had handed him a sheaf of twenty-one poems. Neuberg, having read and been impressed by them, advised making up the number to a round twenty-five. The additional four were quickly supplied" (Rolph, pp. 43-44). Over half of the poems in this second volume were slight revisions of pre-1934 poems, supplies for the new occasion -- too fast, I think, for any deeply conceived aesthetic ordering. The unfortunate results of the failure of a critic to admit that these earlier volumes display a sequence of poems less enlightening than the order of their composition in the Notebooks can be seen, for instance, in G. S. Fraser's explanation in his 1972 edition of his 1957 British Council pamphlet on Thomas as to why he did not rewrite his essay in light of the newly publicized facts of chronology. Explaining why Thomas passed over the 1933 poem "I have longed to move away" for 18 Poems but included it in Twenty-Five Poems, Fraser says that only by 1936 did Thomas feel that the poem ("an expression of a fear felt by Thomas that his poetry was in danger of losing itself in a regressive world of childhood fantasy") was valid as an embodiment of a problem that occurred to him after the 18 Poems volume (Fraser, Dylan Thomas, The British Council, 1957, rev. 1972, pp. 30-31). Actually, this poem (Poem Fourteen in the February 1933 Notebook) which was composed on 1 March 1933, prior to every poem that later appeared in 18 Poems, is a crucial statement of the dark threats of gloomy Welsh Non-Conformism and the terrors of the unconscious in preventing the development of an assertive, affirming Romantic self. The hesitancy in this poem's commitment to the cosmic analogy that begins to dominate the poems later on in the February and even more certainly in the later August Notebook is more appropriate when the poem is read in the Notebook ordering of the poems than when it is read in Twenty-Five Poems. Its "clarity" is thus not a sign of Thomas's poetic development from 1934 to 1936 but rather of his failure

to have developed completely the complex, imagistic style of 18 Poems. Fraser, however, is not alone. Jacob Korg acknowledges Maud's discovery but is undeterred in seeing maturation in stylistic clarity from 18 Poems to Twenty-Five Poems (Korg, pp. 79-80) while A. M. Reddington, arguing that Thomas's career is in part a movement from poems of "doubt" to poems of "faith," admits that the order of publication of the poems does not reflect the true nature of the "progress," as Maud as shown (Reddington, p. 30, 30n). Finally, some otherwise excellent critics in defense of their examination of the earlier poems in the ordering of Collected Poems go so far as to call the notebook poems "drafts" (Rushworth Kidder, Dylan Thomas: The Country of the Spirit, Princeton, 1973, pp. 113-14) or even "a few tentative jottings" (Moynihan, Craft and Art, pp. 25-26, n. 49). The terms "drafts" and "jottings" apply to only a few of the notebook poems. A 1935 letter by Thomas himself confounds these critics and shows that what Thomas considered at the time of its entry a final version was alone copied into a notebook: ". . . my method is this: I write a poem on innumerable sheets of scrap paper, write it on both sides of the paper, often upside down and criss cross ways and unpunctuated . . . bit by bit I copy out the slowly developing poem into an exercise book; and, when it is completed, I type it out. The scrap sheets I burn"(SL 152). Thus, only when Thomas radically revised a notebook poem later on may the notebook version be considered (from that later persepective) a draft; originally, most of the notebook entries were considered final or nearly final versions and should thus be examined chronologically in the Notebooks and re-examined in the ordering of the later separate volumes only when radical revision has occurred.

[7]William Moynihan, "Dylan Thomas and the 'Biblical Rhythm'," PMLA, 79 (December, 1964), 631-47; William Moynihan, The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 217-81; Margaret Anne Hardesty, "An Examination of the Sacramental Vision of Dylan Thomas: Its Sources, Analogues, and Its Expression in His Poetry." Diss. State University of New York at Binghamton 1974.

[8]See note 5 for Williams and Hogler. I examined Thompson's hard to obtain dissertation at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas as Austin.

[9]Rushworth Kidder, Dylan Thomas: The Country of the Spirit (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 120.

[10]Tolley, p. 259.

[11]Walford Davies, New Critical Essays, pp. 155-56; SP 101-02; and Dylan Thomas (Portsmouth, England: The Open University Press, 1976), pp. 20-21.

[12]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 204.

[13]T. H. Jones, Dylan Thomas (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 19.

[14]W. S. Merwin, "The Religious Poet," Adam International Review No. 238 (1953), 73-78; rpt. in Casebook, ed. Brinnin, p. 60.

[15]Bloom, Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 21.

[16]Miller and Slote, p. 341; see Chapter III, n. 92.

[17]Harold Bloom, "Commentary" in The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 863.

[18]Martin Dodsworth, "The Concepts of Mind and the Poetry of Dylan Thomas" in New Critical Essays, p. 130.

[19]Merwin, pp. 60-61; Raymond Stephens, "Self and World: The Earlier Poems," New Critical Essays, p. 23.

[20]Hall, p. 10.

[21]Kidder, p. 129.

[22]Stanford, pp. 73-74.

[23]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 176.

[24]My disagreement with Hardesty is over the degree of success and the difficulty in achieving that success in the later poems, too many of which she could not examine.

[25]Jacob Korg, Dylan Thomas (Twayne, 1965); rpt. (n.p.: Hippocrene Books, 1972), p. 68; Kidder, pp. 117-18; Holbrook, Code, p. 179.

[26]Stephens, p. 28.

[27]Stephens, pp. 28-32.

[28]Stanford, pp. 43-44; Korg, p. 66; Elder Olson, The Poetry of Dylan Thomas (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 93; Tindall RG, p. 31.

[29]Vincent Leitch, "Herbert's Influence in Dylan Thomas's 'I See the Boys of Summer'," Notes and Queries, N.S., 19 (September, 1972), 34.

[30]Walford Davies, New Critical Essays, p. 148.

[31]Olson, pp. 38-40.

[32]Richard Werry, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas," College English, 11 (February, 1950), 252.

[33]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1972), p. 27.

[34]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 205.

[35]Edith Sitwell, rev. of 18 Poems, p. 387.

[36]Stephens, New Critical Essays, p. 44.

[37]Pratt, p. 92.

[38]Dylan Thomas, Letter to the Editor, quoted in "Notes on Contributors" in Life and Letters Today, 13 (December, 1935), 232.

[39]Adix, p. 61.

[40]H. H. Kleinman, The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1963); Bernard Knieger, "Dylan Thomas: The Christianity of the 'Altarwise by Owl-light' Sequence," College English, 23 (May, 1962), 623-28; Naomi Christensen, "Dylan Thomas and the Double-cross of Death," Ball State Teacher's Forum, 4 (Autumn, 1963), 49-53.

[41]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Open University), p. 26; Walford Davies, rev. of The Religious Sonnets of Dylan Thomas by H. H. Kleinman, Essays in Criticism, 14 (July, 1964), 319.

[42]Howard Sergeant, "Religion in Modern British Poetry: The Ambiguities of Dylan Thomas," Aryan Path, 37 (August, 1966), 356; David Holbrook, Llareggub Revisited: Dylan Thomas and the State of Modern Poetry (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1962), pp. 134-35.

[43]Peter Revell, "Altarwise by Owl-light," Alphabet, 5 (June, 1964), 42-46.

[44]Kidder, pp. 132, 136, 139.

[45]Olson, pp. 64, 66, 86.

[46]Monroe C. Beardsley and Sam Hynes, "Misunderstanding Poetry: Notes on Some Readings of Dylan Thomas," College English, 21 (March, 1960), 320f.

[47]Ralph Maud, "Dylan Thomas Astro-Navigated," rev. of The Poetry of Dylan Thomas by Elder Olson, Essays in Criticism, 5 (April, 1955), 168.

[48]Korg, p. 131.

[49]Korg, p. 132.

[50]Revell, p. 49.

[51]Kleinman, p. 32f.

[52]Kleinman, p. 44f.

[53]D. R. Evans and J. P. Hardy, Letter on Dylan Thomas to the Editors of TLS (23 June 1972), 719, cols. 1 and 2.

[54]Kleinman, p. 54f.

[55]Kleinman, pp. 62-63; M. E. Grenander, "Sonnet V from Dylan Thomas' 'Altarwise by Owl-light' Sequence," Notes and Queries, 5 (June 1958), 263.

[56]Kleinman, p. 79f.

[57]Matthew Hodgart, "Old Pup," rev. of The Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas edited by Ralph Maud and A Concordance to the Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas by Robert C. Williams, New York Review of Books (3 August 1967), p. 22.

[58]Revell, p. 56.

[59]Revell, pp. 58-59.

[60]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 255.

CHAPTER V

THE POEMS OF 1936-45 (THE MAP OF LOVE TO DEATHS AND ENTRANCES)

The Altarwise sequence represented what Thomas himself recognized as a carrying of "certain features to their logical conclusion," a task that "had . . . to be done" even though the result be "mad parody" (SL 178). The opening pages of Chapter IV reviewed the question of "phases" in Thomas's poetic career. If the earlier phase clearly ends with Altarwise's positing of an almost omnipotent Christ-like poetic self whose imagination is capable of releasing love into the world, the remainder of Thomas's poetry, it has been argued, may be viewed as a second phase (1936-52) or as two phases, a transitional "middle" phase that consists of the poems on marriage and war (1936-45) and a final phase, emerging only slightly later than the middle phase (1946-52) but becoming increasingly dominant in its depiction of the particular sacramental landscapes of childhood. The dominant feature of these later poems is the transformation of the assertive, apocalypse-fostering Romantic self-as-Christ whose testament is Altarwise by Owl-light, into a less domineering self, a self as priest, functionary, agent, medium of the divine power in nature whose interpreter the poet is. This shift implies that Thomas came more and more to realize the resistant otherness of the external world, too easily absorbed into the self in many of the earlier poems by the cosmic analogy, and a subsequent relinquishing of his claims to contain, as The Poet in His Christhood, all necessary power

to transform the outer world. Relying on visionary memory to evoke the spiritualized landscapes of his childhood, Thomas came to find in a vision of sacramental love infusing the landscape the final answer to the problem of the recalcitrant other that baffled him in most of the marriage poems and that posed an almost insurmountable threat in the war poems. The poet's final task was, through imaginative action, to release that power of love into the world. In true Wordsworthian fashion, he sought to bring relationship and love even where he could not radically transform the outer world. Nevertheless, a residual luminosity from the cosmic vision of the earlier poems remained in the sacramental landscapes of the later poems, especially in "Author's Prologue," his final completed poem. The poems from the 1936-45 period, then, represent Thomas's conscious struggle to adjust his style and themes to the presence of an ever more intrusive, anti-poetic objective world. These poems fall rather conveniently into five groups: (1) poems on poetics, (2) the "marriage" and fatherhood poems, (3) the war poems, (4) three long poems on love, and (5) two central poems on landscapes and childhood. Culminating in "Fern Hill," his most famous later poem whose eminent position matches that of Altarwise among the earlier poems, this chapter will trace the general development of Thomas's later poetry in terms of the relation of self and world and other important Romantic traits as outlined at the beginning of Chapter IV. Following Chapter V, Chapter VI will deal with the question of whether Thomas, in his final years, moved beyond the vision of "Fern Hill" in his last eight poems. Before considering the first of the five major groups of poems from the 1936-45 period, a brief survey of critical opinion on Thomas's changing views of the self/world relationship during these years is in order.

Two quotations, one from T. H. Jones's perceptive generalist study of Thomas,and one, dealing with a slightly later time, from Vernon Watkins characterize Thomas's poet-Altarwise dilemma. Speaking of the year of the publication of The Map of Love, Jones says that 1939 was the pivotal year in Thomas's poetic development: "his writing was beginning to develop in new directions -- marriage, fatherhood, war: the young poet was beginning to find that life was more complex and more terrifying than he had envisaged."[1] These "objective" forces were hard to order by the same sort of imaginative solution that governed the earlier poems wherein it was merely the cosmos as a whole that had to be seen anew, oddly, an easier thing than transforming one's wife into a vision of Love or repulsing German fire-bombs that left London full of burning children. In a seminal comment, Vernon Watkins links Thomas's experience of the war with the subsequent strategy of the post-war poems of childhood and visionary landscapes: "Surely it was the intervening horror, the impact of war, particularly the London air raids, on his appalled and essentially tragic vision, that restrained him. Nothing less than the truth would now satisfy him. With his precise visionary memory he was able to reconstruct out of joy the truth of his childhood, both in his poems and in his late stories and broadcast scripts . . . the pressure of the anarchy of war itself and the vision of distorted London . . . compelled his imagination forward to 'Ceremony After A Fire Raid' and to the beautiful poems evoking childhood, 'Poem in October' and 'Fern Hill'"(AST xii-xiii). Reminiscent of Wallace Stevens' belief that the "pressure of reality" from the outer world must be met by the "pressure of imagination" from within, Watkins' comment allows us to interpret the post-war landscape poems not as simply escapist, nostalgic pieces but as imaginative compensation

for the destruction of war.

One recalls Wordsworth's disillusionment with revolutionary France and the subsequent emergence of the central themes of The Prelude. In fact, one Thomas critic, Jacob Korg, sees the Wordsworthian analogy as crucial in Thomas's later poems: Korg says that Thomas "turns, in a familiar Wordsworthian shift, from the introspective imagination of youth to encounters with people and external nature; visible realities rival cosmic vision as sources of truth . . . he invested such figures as lovers, children, and people recently dead and such places as Laugharne and Sir John's Hill with his own prior feelings . . . and the outer world is not used to vindicate his visionary power but to reveal holiness in humble people, landscapes, and animals."[2] In an incisive essay, Walford Davies makes the similar point that the later poems are a search for a context, at a less than cosmic scale, in which to place externalized psychic events. Thomas's increasing ability to reinherit the Welsh community of his youth (minus its religion) led to the discovery of pastoral as that context.[3] In his lecture at the 1974 Dylan Thomas Summer School, Davies expanded on these remarks. Tracing Thomas's later development as that of a "Romantic poet," Davies cites not only the "dejection ode" poem "Once it was the Colour of Saying" but three important traits of the post-war landscape poems: (1) the exploration of personal identity in terms of memory, (2) the poetry of particularized landscapes, and (3) the study of the relation between man and nature (DTS). Raymond Stephens, in his important essay on Thomas, "Self and World: The Earlier Poems," defines this same transition to the later poems as a desire to escape the narcissism of the poet/cosmos identity that collapsed into its two fusing extremes all forms and experiences and people in be-

tween. Having "won" his victory over natural process in the Altarwise sequence, the poet can afford to become the medial "celebrator" of a sacred landscape informed by "a creative and loving God."[4] Finally, we should recall Thomas's description of his poetic phases. Although Tindall says that Thomas acknowledged Tindall's division of the poetry into the three phases of "womb-tomb," the "poems of actuality" (RG 144-45), and the "period of humanity," Thomas's self-designation in the 1949 broadcast "On Reading One's Own Poems" was of only two periods. The earlier poems are called "narrowly odd" (self absorbing world) and the later "wider and deeper" (self coming to know the outer world as other than itself). Later in the same broadcast, Thomas expands on this division, noting that the earlier poems dealt with "the very many lives and deaths . . . in the tumultuous world of my own being" and the later, to which we now turn, with "war, grief, and the great holes and corners of universal love" (QEOM 130, 137).

Poems on the Poetic Process: 1936-45. A group of ten poems on the poetic process registers Thomas's struggle to realize the substantial otherness of the external world while at the same time fostering a relationship between self and world based on love. Through his final completed poem, "Author's Prologue," Thomas never abandoned his belief that the task of the poet should be to foster love between himself and nature or between himself and other human beings.

The poem "Once it was the Colour of Saying" (P 144) deals with the poet's fears that his early, florid style (a synesthetic "colour of saying") was only a way of drowning external reality, not of achieving any valid relationship with it. Now viewing his earlier verse as a sort of aesthetic indulgence, he calls for a chastening of style that gives the outer world its due as a separate entity. Lines 1-6 describe the earlier

verse that "soaked my table" or created a "capsized field" (overturned/ boys' schoolcaps / a field that fit the size of the poet's head) or "seaslides of saying." These colorful words enlivened the outer world, which is otherwise seen as "the uglier side of a hill" which contains a "black and white patch of girls" -- a black and white film or the figures in a coloring book that the poet's organic imagination sees as a "patch" that "grew." Yet he fears that his imaginative coloring of the external world was an illusion that he must "undo" so that "the charmingly drowned" innundated by the magical charm of imagination may "arise" in their separateness to live and die as themselves. Recalling his boyhood prank of throwing stones at the lovers lying under trees in Cwmdonkin Park, the poet now realizes that the love they sought between one another is the love his own poems must hereafter foster in cleaner language: "The shade of their trees was a word of many shades / And a lamp of lightning for the poor in the dark." To foster such love that finds human lovers, nature, and the poet's word united, he says that his "saying shall be my undoing" -- my old style will foil me / my new style must be an unravelling of the old obscurities -- so that each of my weighty, stone-like words (l. 13) will come across as easily as if I rotated my stone-pitching arm in a spinning wind-up like a movie reel before my release.

In a basic change, Thomas is announcing that his future poems of love will seek not to radically transform the outer world to the heart's desire but rather to honor the integrity and otherness of the object even as he still hopes that a single spirit of love may unite the two. Calling it "this Cwmdonkin poem" and admitting its expressivistic origin -- "the form was consistently emotional and I can't change it without a change of heart" (LVW 52, 54) -- Thomas reveals what will be-

come a deepening interest in writing poems of reminiscence of his own childhood set in particularized landscapes associated with love and written in a mood of celebration and joy.[5] Still, as Walford Davies rightly cautions, it would be wrong to read this poem as a dramatic choice between pure aestheticism and an austere, arid realism: for Thomas's style remains very obscure in the marriage poems of this period and to the end he still remained deeply interested in what Davies calls "verbal intuitions necessary to redeem a gray world."[6] This poem, then, is a caveat and an adjustment of aims and intentions, what Watkins calls a desire to move "in the direction of the living voice" (LVW 21), that is, a voice that reflects inner, psychic events but is still faithful to the objective reality that serves as a vehicle for those events without losing its independence. The external world is, in effect, to be elevated in status yet still connected to the poet by language and love, "a word of many shades." Though at times he still would like to reshape the external world, and still calling himself a "singing Walt" (P 156, "The Countryman's Return," 1940), he now realizes that he must separate the illusion of having done so from the real thing. This rather calm and determined re-examination of the relation between the inner world created by language and the more stolid and solid external world is matched by three poems in the Romantic tradition of the dejection ode -- the poem about the drying up of poetic powers or the failure of imagination to reshape the outer world.

The first of these three poems is the simplest, "On No Work of Words" (P 140). At least two of Thomas's critics, Walford Davies and William Moynihan, describe this poem as a "dejection ode."[7] Clark Emery alludes specifically to Coleridge's Dejection: An Ode (WDT 157), while Davies alludes to Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Yeats. Though not

by any means in the same class as the dejection odes by these luminaries, Thomas's poem partakes of the general mood of the kind: a temporary loss of faith in the power of imagination that is transformed at the end into (qualified) affirmation. Lines 1-3 establish the normally intimate relation between the self and world as disjunct: the season of autumn, a time of fruition and plenty, should correspond to imaginative fruition in the poet, but it does not do so here. The "bloody/ Belly of the rich year" (the blood of slaughtered lambs?) is matched by "the big purse of my body" that had endured "three lean months" of no poetic gestation. Determined to overcome this aridity (l. 3), the poet, in stanzas 2-4, outlines the final aims of his art. First, his task is to establish communion between himself and a natural world divinely blessed: "To take /in order/ to give is all" as the poet sends the "manna" and "dew" up to heaven. Unfortunately, in times of dryness, the poet's "lovely gift of the gab" is sent back to him "on a blind shaft." Stanza 3 condemns the poet who takes from the outer world only to return what he takes unaltered by imagination: "To lift to leave from the treasures of man." These treasures may be other poets' poems which the poet, in a dry spell, is tempted to steal, thus violating the creed of originality. Whether stolen or his own, the "marked breath" (poems) of the poet is engulfed by death's "bad dark" that obliterates the poet's "mysteries" that he stole and thus must now forsake. To give up trying to write poetry is a kind of death-in-life before the poet's inevitable physical death (l. 10).

The last two complex lines read as follows: as my own body and external nature are one ("Ancient woods of my blood"), let them both devolve into their primeval origins ("the nut of the seas") if I fail in my task of creatively transforming the world. This creative trans-

formation "is each man's work," a work that sustains outer nature and inner self alike; however, one may fail in his task should be "burn or return" that world, that is, should he destroy that world by selfishly absorbing or draining it of its reality and potency or should he give back the world just as it was without any lasting linkage formed of love. (The "which" clause in line 12 modifies "world" not the infinitives). The images of the final lines re-establish the inner/outer linkage that was disjunct in lines 1-2 and the whole poem's setting forth of the poet's task as that of establishing significant relationship is justified therein. The imagery associated with money that permeates the poem -- rich, purse, poverty, treasures, currencies, count, pay -- though odd, does reinforce the idea that poetry is a medium of exchange and interchange, a way of establishing relation. The very existence of nature and the self (ll. 11-12) seems dependent on the ongoing imaginative action of the poet and every man, a tall order indeed.

A somewhat more complex statement of the relation of inner and outer worlds is the poem "When I Woke" (P 150). Unlike the earlier poems where so frequently the outer world was secondary in importance to the inner one, here, although outer still depends very much upon inner, a deeper mutual interdependence short of fused identity is discernible; both inner and outer worlds are equally threatened by the destructiveness of war whose imminence was one of the catalysts of the poem. The first line of the poem -- "When I woke the town spoke" -- with its internal rhyme speaks of the balance between the inner world of the sleeping, dreaming self and the world of the town. As the town "spoke" we know that Thomas's view of the desired oneness of words and things is at work here (the waking poet's perceiving of the town is inseparable from the words he implicitly draws on to apprehend the town). The

reality of the town may depend upon the presence of the perceiving individual, but that perception once achieved, the importance of that outer reality is made manifest in the remaining lines of stanza 1. The commonplace morning sounds of Laugharne, Thomas's seaside village home, are external harrowers of the dream figures that emerge from the nightmare world of sleep which is also the source of the similar image of his own early poetry: reptiles, frogs, satans, female figures are all "dispelled" by the sea or "dinned aside" by the morning village crowd (ll. 3,6). Like one of the figures of endurance that Wordsworth often meets in his landscapes, Thomas finds "a man outside" (my italics), who, with a billhook and a beard that make him seem like Father Time, in his scything down the grass in the outer world seems also to have "slashed down the last snake" of the poet's inner dream world, an act that seems purgative in a way yet also threatening, for the source of the poet's nightmare and (early) poetry are one. The snake, for instance, is described as "a wand or subtle bough" making it Aaron's rod but also the poet's magic wand Imagination. Both the poet's dream figures and the town's crowd and scythe-swinger seem embodiments of ancient human experience, even evolution. The "snake" of imagination is matched by the "coiling crowd" outside, the sleeping poet by the "man outside" whose timeless act of ordering the landscape (inner and outer) matches the poet's dream images that recall man's evolutionary past -- frogs, snakes, reptiles -- as well as his Christian mythic past -- woman-luck (Eve), satans, the snake, Aaron's rod. Hoxie Fairchild's brief comment on this poem illuminates the first stanza: it is, she says, a poem about the desire to escape the world of dream, myth, and symbol for external reality, although this reality is itself the product of imaginative perception.[8] In stanza 2, the poet does to the world what the world,

by its agent the scythe-swinger, has done to the poet -- he affects its existence.

In lines 1-6 ("earth" is the direct object of "make") the poet tells us that when he wakes up in bed in the morning he will

> make . . .
> . . . . . .
> Everybody's earth

because he is a maker (a poet) and a perceiver of the world that only seems to exist by his perceiving it fully. As in the early poems where the creator and redeemer poet was Christ, here he is "God in bed" making "good and bad," his own ultimate source of creativity and ethics. Walking along the sea in the morning to wake up, the poet, in that image, is also God creating the face of waters and Christ walking on those waters ("a water-face walk") as well as the poet whose imagination is an ocean and who, mundanely, washes off his face in the morning. Though the earth is the ancient ground of evolution ("mamoth") and divinely ordered ("sparrowfall"), and though it is death-ridden, it is still the creation of the God-poet's "scatter-breath," a fact illustrated for us (l. 22) by the poet's almost condescendingly simple display of his metaphorical power: "Where birds ride like leaves and boats like ducks." However, this beneficial interdependence of inner and outer worlds is threatened in the last two sentences of the poem (ll. 22-30). There, intruding between nature and the poet's magical language is "a voice in the erected air, / No prophet-progeny of mine" whose message is to "cry that my sea-town was breaking." Probably the "voice" is a clock or bell tower or radio waves in the air announcing the outbreak of World War II (RG 233; WDT 167); however, as it cancels out the poet's creative, outer/inner linking voice, it may more generally be seen as the forces of destruction and war that threaten the outer world as the nightmare images of stanza 1

threatened by the poet's inner world of dreams. This interpretation is supported by the final three lines wherein the scythe-swinger of stanza 1, Father Time, and the poet as god of stanza 2 -- the former a symbol of the pastoral outer world impinging creatively and healthily on the imaginative inner world and the latter the reverse -- are absent ("No Time . . . No God"), both unable to deal with the overwhelming pressure of reality represented by the onslaught of the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht. The poet's only recourse is to retreat -- to his bed as death-bed: "I drew the white sheets over the islands / And the coins on my eyelids sang like shells." If "islands" are "eye-lands" punningly (RG 235), and since "white sheets" can be paper for poems and since in "On No Work of Words" we found money ("coins" here) to be poems, and since the coins here "sang" as if shells (= symbols of the union of nature and art, closely allied to the wind-harp), then the final lines, although superficially a retreat, are a strategic retreat from the forces of destruction that can only be annulled by the poet's indirect weapon of imaginative creation. In fact, as noted above, this is exactly what Vernon Watkins saw in Thomas's post-war landscape poems, a compensatory creative act to balance the long external "pressure" of the war. The purposeful ambiguity of the final lines brings this dejection ode in line with its predecessors by ending on a note, however muted, of hope.

A final dejection ode, a radical revision of an earlier poem, is "How Shall My Animal" (P 134-35). A radical revision of the final poem in the 1930 Notebook, this poem was, as Thomas wrote to Watkins in 1938, "one I have spent a great deal of time on . . . I had worked on it for months" (LVW 39, 40). To Treece in the same year Thomas wrote, using this poem to exemplify his belief that his poems were expressivist psychodramas of the beast, angel, and madman within (SL 196).

Revised in the same densely imagistic style of the earlier poem out of which it came, "How Shall My Animal" is a strikingly clear expression of Thomas's complete awareness that his true poetic mission was the Romantic one of releasing imagination into the outer world. As Jacob Korg generously notes, Tindall's reading of this poem (RG 164-66) is particularly acute. My reading generally follows his with only a couple of local readings as new suggestions. Stanza 1: phrased as a question, the eleven lines of the first stanza ask how the "animal" or embodied imagination (animal = anima-in-the-flesh of the poem) can retain its original power when restrictively imprisoned in the necessary and necessarily limiting words of the poem. Living as a "wizard shape" in the poet's "cavernous skull" that contains the opposites of experience (abscesses/exultation), the imagination, when brought into the world in a poem, must ironically "endure burial" in its forthcoming. The "spelling wall" could be the poem on paper, the poet's mouth, or his mind where poems are first formed (l. 5 makes the last of these seem probable). Rather than entering the external world as a prisoner of its own language, the imagination ought to be fiercely activist -- "furious," "drunk," a tentacle-waving octopus (the most satisfactory of the many animal images that evoke imagination as a powerful, transforming power). Imagination's task (transforming the external) could hardly be more clearly stated. It is to "quarrel / With the outside weathers" so that the sphere of the heavens conforms to the sphere of the imagination's own creative, sphere-like orbs: "The natural circle of the discovered skies / Drawn down to its /the imagination's/ weird eyes."

Stanza 2: the poet wonders how the imagination can affix itself to outer reality, in an organic-sexual way, so as to unite the opposites, to transform the bitter, outer earth into a place of love and joy and to

fulfill thereby the poet's expressivist intentions in saying his poem. To link inner and outer is to "magnetize," imagination being the magnet, and its attracted object the "midnight blaze" of the outer world that intimidates the poet's heart, the womb and tomb of his poems. If the imagination is a mare, it seeks the "studded male" of the world, its fertile counterpart in nature. The "brute land" of the outer world is assaulted by the poet's dismantling and reshaping powers until "the locked ground sprout out / The black, burst sea rejoice" and the octopus-armed imagination from the poet's blood veins "squeeze from each red particle / The parched and raging voice" of his expressivist poems.

Stanza 3: contrasting his own poetic process with that of others, the poet finds that he fishes in deeper waters of the mind for a more powerful catch; yet when the great fish or octopus imagination is brought to dry land (i.e., embodied in poems on dry pages) it seems stripped of its powers, a fish out of water, and unable to fulfill its task of bringing order to the outer world. Other poets (= fishermen) who merely "creep and harp on the tide" for "mermen" (half human/ half nature) with the obvious lures of gold and sex ("bridebait of gold thread") are nothing compared to <u>my</u> fishing expedition into the deepest levels of my own psyche, the "temple-bound / Curl-locked and animal cave-pools of spells and bone." The poet's thread and hook are a "living skein" of "tongue and ear" as he sacrifices his own self and the tools of poetic articulation to get at his own hidden powers. Finding the "tentacle" of the hidden octopus, whose myriad legs and liquid smoke screen suggest imagination's powers, the poet hauls it up to dry land to "clap its great blood down" in a poem. But once on land, the octopus cannot realize its own nature; imagination is out of its element

when it tries to live in the wasteland of the world. It cannot order that place: "Never shall beast be born to atlas the few seas / Or poise to day on a horn."

Stanza 4: an elegy for the dead imagination lying drying on the land, this stanza has the poet see the crumbling of his poems back into their oceanic sources in the deeper regions of the mind, the severance of natural and supernatural, and the retreat of the mortally wounded imagination to the poet's heart, its final home, to die. A dense opening section (ll. 1-5) that troubles Tindall may be read as follows: octopus-imagination, sigh and remain stripped of your power in the land of the outer world; like Samson with his hair cut off, you have no power in the outer world and the cold scissors of untransformable reality cut your tentacles off. My poems are like the pillars of love ("love hewn in pillars") that Samson pulled down: as my dying imagination slinks from outer land back into inner sea, it pulls down my poem-pillars embossed with carvings of bird, saint, and nun. This suicidal act occurs when my young poet's mouth speaks its poems, their inadequate embodiment of imagination and love then becoming apparent and that power's prior slipping back into its inner, oceanic home made thus apparent to me. The imagination now gone from the outer world wherein it fused opposites together, that world splits again into "flying heaven" and "knocked earth" that had been one. Thus, the new poet's first poems that cannot sustain their embodiment of love collapse back into the unconscious as the besieged imagination resists its imprisonment in inadequate forms. The poem's final three lines sum up its action in an address to imagination:

> Lie dry, rest robbed, my breast,
> You have kicked from a dark den, leaped up the whinnying light,
> And dug your grave in my breast.

One of Thomas's most powerful poems, "How Shall My Animal" is clearly in the Romantic tradition in its central emphasis on imagination, its role of uniting inner and outer, resolving opposites into unity, and creating poems of love. Though ending in dejection, the poem in its unflinching appraisal of the real problems facing the Romantic poet who would reshape the world makes more powerful Thomas's other poems on the poetic process that end in an affirmation of the poet's ability to release love into the world. Two such poems are revisions of notebook poems, the first substantial and the second a radical revision, that reveal, both in their changes and in the poet's desire to refashion them at a later time, Thomas's development towards poems dealing with specific figures in particularized landscapes imbued with love, the power released by the poet's imagination in the process of creation.

In Chapter III and IV we have encountered "The Hunchback in the Park" either in general terms or in its earlier version. The revised version, more unified in structure but essentially the same in theme, may be considered a "substantial" revision, something between changing a few phrases on the one hand or totally reshaping the central images on the other. Its constant theme has been stated above: the Romantic poet's creation of a figure of beauty in solitary communion with nature brings to the poet the sense of unity of being. In addition, however, the specific problem of the relation of self and world remains. As in "When I Woke," so here Thomas toys with the view that the reality of the external world is only an impression in the mind of the perceiver; the products of imagination alone can exist independently without the sustaining presence of a constant perceiver. Stanzas 1-2: a single sentence, these lines introduce the hunchback who will become the figure of the creative artist. A Romantic who communes alone with nature,

he is "a solitary mister / Propped between trees and water." He cannot sleep in the park that is locked up at night, but he is the first to enter and last to leave. The garden's existence depends on the hunchback's presence: the opening of the "garden locks"(locks = metal locks/ canal locks) "lets the trees and water enter" the hunchback's perceiving consciousness. Apparently, the reality of the world (garden) depends on the poet's imaginative perception of it in its fullness. The hunchback is also a Romantic "outcast" figure, apart from society, from the "Sunday sombre bell" of the evening church service that signals the closing of the park (society/religion vs. nature). Society's "newspaper" is only good to eat bread from as the park's water-fountain's "chained cup" is an image of the invisible chains that society places on the deformed solitary. His bread and water are his communion in the landscape of the park, opposite the church bells of Sunday services. Sleeping in a "dog kennel" at night outside the park, he remains alone though society at least does not chain him like the cup (fear of theft) and the dog (oppressive control of the natural by man). The adult poet who is remembering the hunchback-artist establishes a second viewpoint, that of himself as a young boy in the park (Cwmdonkin Park) who "in the fountain basin . . . sailed my ship." Since the early poem "Rain cuts the place we tread" (Poem VII, 1930-32 Notebook) interprets this sailing of toy boats in the park fountain as an act of imagination that transforms the sky and balances inner and outer worlds, Thomas's allusion here to his earliest imaginative experiences link him to the hunchback: adult poet, incipient poet as child, and hunchback are all engaged in creative activity in the landscape of the park.

Stanza 3-4: the hunchback gains his sense of identity by metaphorical linkage (and personification in the second instance) with the

natural processes in the park -- "Like the park birds he came early / Like the water he sat down" -- not with the cruelly taunting boys who identify him only as "Hey mister." Still, these boys are "truant boys," self-created exiles from school, as Dan Jones tells us he and Thomas often were when they skipped school to read each other's poems in the park" (P 271). The boys, too, are capable of creativity but (first) of a lower kind -- parodic imitation -- as they pose "hunchbacked in mockery." Yet like the truant boy -- Thomas the poet -- who sailed boats and recited poems here, these boys, in the act of imitating the hunchback, seem to prophesy their own development into the figure of the artist that he represents. Both boys and hunchback are united in their opposition to the "park keeper" (st. 4, l.5), symbol of officialdom and Welsh society, whose relation to nature is only a deathly one. He is a sort of undertaker: "the park keeper / With his stick that picked up leaves." Yet the boys still exist only as perceptions of the hunchback, "running . . . / On out of sound" into the willow groves of the park.

Stanzas 5-7: back again, the taunting boys advance as artists from parodic imitation to imaginative creators as they make tigers spring from their eyes and fill the willow groves that become "blue with sailors." Possibly the real sailors that used the park during wartime, they are also the imaginative ("blue") products of the young poet who sailed his ship (which must have sailors) here in the park's fountain. The repetition of "made" in the first position of lines in stanza 5 (l. 4) and stanza 6 (l. 1) links the boys' and the hunchback's creative processes as similar in kind. In stanza 6, the hunchback creates the figure of love with which he yearns to unite: "A woman figure without fault." This internal figure promises unity of being

(at least "until bell time" when church and society close the park and its garden) for she is "straight as a young elm" to match his "crooked bones." One may recall in the description of a female lover as a tree (cf. also st. 1, l. 3) Frank Kermode's statement in Romantic Image that links love, tree, and woman as aspects of the organic Romantic image: "The /world/ tree is responsible for universal harmony . . . it is inhabited by Love, and it grows in the heart of a woman who is beautiful and does not think."[9] When the hunchback leaves the park at night, all of the "external" objects of the park -- railings, shrubberies, the birds, grass, trees, lake, boys -- will have "followed the hunchback / To his kennel in the dark." All is dependent on the perceiving consciousness of the poet except for the woman figure -- the product of imagination -- who will

> stand in the night
> After the locks and chains
> All night in the unmade park.

The park is "unmade" for nature is not man-made yet if it depends for its reality on the hunchback's perceiving it, then his nightly absences bring nightly oblivion to the park -- or world -- except that the park is eternally perceived and thus sustained by the hunchback's agent -- the vigilant woman, anima, imagination. That is why the hunchback-poet does not take the woman home with him at night to his kennel-home outside the park. Even the boys are called "wild" and "innocent as strawberries" because like the park but unlike the hunchback they (as yet) exist only as nature does, though their incipient imaginations may, like the child Thomas's, develop. Simple as can be in language and superficially a touching story of a lonely outcast, "The Hunchback in the Park" is equally a significant, almost profound statement by Thomas of his understanding of the nature of the Romantic artist, his creative

process, his relation to love and nature, and the way in which external and internal words interact. What, as a dejection ode, "When I Woke" failed to sustain, this poem does.

Thomas cut some lines from the notebook version of "The Hunchback" about the hunchback's "going daft . . . getting dafter" as well as about how the woman figure is "frozen" all winter. Such critical statements detracted from the new intent of the later, more affirming poem. Even more so did Thomas change the early version of "After the Funeral" (Poem Six in the February Notebook), originally an almost cruelly distanced account of the death of an old person, based on the death of Ann Jones, his relative on whose farm was Fernhill, Thomas's childhood Eden-place. There, the world-weary adolescent poet told us that "yet another" person has died, "man / Or woman" and the village gossips have one less person to tattle about. In a letter to Miss Johnson at the time of Ann's approaching death from cancer Thomas speaks of his inability to feel emotion ("I feel utterly unmoved") and coldly pairs his verbs in present and past tenses ("She still loves -- or loved -- me") to account indifferently for her possibly having died as he is writing this letter (SL 11). When Thomas radically revised the 1933 poem in 1938 and 1939, he dropped most of the cheap cynicism from the poem and made it into something of a traditional elegy. The elegiac devices of nature's mourning, the poet's apology for his own lack of evocative power, the poet's expression of his own concerns, and commentary on religion are all present. Although still unsure that the final version was good (LVW 57) and that he had not worked hard enough on it, Thomas was perceptive enough to state in a BBC reading of his own poems that this poem, in its revised version, was a pivotal poem between the early poems of the self ("the tumultuous world of my own

being") and the later poems of "universal love." In fact, "After the Funeral" manages to evoke that universal love through the poet's powers to praise another individual without too immediately absorbing himself into the cosmos. Set in a specific landscape and time, and focussing on a single individual who is characterized, the poem shows Thomas's ability to apply the imagination to realistic particulars and yet still to transform them. The poem is, indeed, as Thomas says, "about the life and death of one particular human being I knew" (QEOM 137). Various pairs and opposites govern the poem: Thomas as a young mourner and older poet, mourning Thomas versus the Christian mourners, Ann as she was and Ann as she is transformed by the poet's words, and the poet's own double ability to describe Ann either as a realist or a Romantic.

Lines 1-15: a jumble of associated images from the funeral day, appropriately so to dramatize the young boy's disorientation at the new experience. He stands apart from what he sees as hypocritical Christian mourners whose tears are false tears made of spittle or salted by the salty sweat of sleeves not eyes (l. 5). The sad-eared mule that pulls the coffin wagon sets the tone of insincerity with its "mule praises, brays" which may refer to human "grief" as well. The coffin is lowered to a happy sound of the hammers, "one peg" in the universal coffin of death. Later, the young boy, in the parlor back at Ann's house with its "stuffed fox and stale fern" that, as the aspidistra the English, designates middle-class rigidity and grim social custom, laments his inability to write an elegy: ". . . a desolate boy who slits his throat / In the dark of the coffin and sheds dry leaves." Still the Romantic expressivist and Christ who would shed his blood on Ann to raise her up, the young poet's "dry leaves" -- both of autumn and his own earlier cynical elegy in the notebook -- are an inadequate response.

Beginning anew, then, he universalizes "dead, humped Ann" into a figure of rejuvenation in nature: "Whose hooded, fountain heart once fell in puddles / Round the parched world of Wales and drowned each sun."

She may be called a nun ("hooded") of the wasteland landscape she transforms, but, the poet tells us in a parenthesis (ll. 16-20), he knows that this is a "monstrous image" created by his imagination, created "out of praise" (both in order to and outside the ranges of praise). Not a "holy / Flood" but a "still drop" was her nature, and, being a Welsh Puritan, she would "need no druid of her broken body," no poet to make her a Eucharist ("broken body") that sacramentalizes nature when by her Christian faith she longs for a Christian heaven. Nevertheless, building on his unwavering perception of Ann as but a withered old country woman and Puritan, Thomas insists on unleashing his poetic powers to transform her. Thus, in traditional elegiac fashion but with additional Romantic seriousness about the "convention," he calls on nature to conduct a pantheistic service (Christianity is specifically excluded) in nature's "brown chapel." Four "crossing birds" may "bless" her with their signs but not the "hymning heads" of his human mourners in church. She was "wood-tongued," inarticulate yet spiritually close to the woods which conduct her true burial service while the seas' "bellbuoy" makes the waters a sunken cathedral. In the church of woods and sea the poet places "her love," the central power for good in the world as Thomas's own self-designated "universal love" poems would show. Like a maudlin, overwrought gravestone statue, the poet characterizes his own poem mythologizing Ann as "this skyward statue / With the wild beast and blessed and giant skull." Composing in the dreary conditions of a room with rain outside its window (also = head with tearful eyes), the poet again juxtaposes the transfigured Ann

of his poem to Ann as she was. These are five of Thomas's best lines:

> I know her scrubbed and sour humbled hands
> Lie with religion in their cramp, her threadbare
> Whisper in a damp word, her wits drilled hollow,
> Her fist of a face died clenched on a round pain;
> And sculptured Ann is seventy years of stone.

Living and dying in the "lie" of restrictive Welsh Puritanism and hard country labor, Ann's stoic human fortitude and realistically perceived beauty lends her enough substantial existence as a kind of hero of endurance to justify the poet's transfiguration of her by means of his poem, his "monumental / Argument of the hewn voice" that releases her watery "love" into "the parched worlds of Wales." Uniting real and mythic Ann in the phrase "sculptured Ann," the poet says that he will never leave her graveside until all of nature as well as the Welsh community represented by the fox and fern are transformed:

> Storm me forever over her grave until
> The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love
> And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill.

From the stuffed fox and stale fern (l. 11) of Welsh parlors to the "ferned and Foxy woods" of a pantheistic service for Ann (l. 24) to the love-crying fox and fructifying fern of the poem's final line, an apotheosis of nature and of Ann by the "love" released by the poet's poem, Thomas consistently controls the poem's various perspectives on Ann, Welsh chapel society, and the poet himself as elegist. Is Thomas <u>really</u> saying that his poetry can revive the dead and release universal love? Walford Davies, for once, seems almost too startled to answer: "To what degree can language be genuinely creative? Can it mime the miracle of resurrection?"[10] Elsewhere, he admits the attempt but denies it victory: "A substantial theme is the inadequacy of language to keep human reality alive; but the poem's poignancy lies nevertheless in that attempt" (<u>SP</u> 111). Raymond Stephens, however, seems right in his

comments on the poem's final lines: "The ending is now miraculous in the more usual religious sense, that the breath of life in the poet, his words, carry the conviction that he can indeed bring the dead back to life. The 'resurrection' of Ann Jones in this poem is equally the 'resurrection' of the poet himself. That is to say that the poem plots a movement toward self-transcendence . . . the 'natural' experience is translated into the 'supernatural' -- is transformed by the creative use of metaphor and symbol into a vision of miracle."[11] For once, Thomas firmly grasps the recalcitrant fact in all its resistant otherness before attempting the transfiguration into vision. To do both, as Stanford notes, is, in a double sense, to write what he simply calls "a poem of love."[12] Three less complex poems on poetics confirm Thomas's increasing emphasis on the spreading of love as the poet's chief responsibility, his answer to the problem of the terms of the relation of self and world.

The first of these poems is "When All My Five and Country Senses See" (P 138-39). Two slightly different perspectives on the poem are possible. Walford Davies (SP 112-13) sees the poem as dividing into two sections: (1) a discussion of the life of the senses during human life (ll. 1-12) and (2) the post-mortem life of "cosmic consciousness" where the poet's still sentient "heart" maintains its relationship with "love's countries" (= the universe seen in its visionary form, not its rationally perceived, fallen form). The speaker may be a foetus forecasting these two lives, human and cosmic, or possibly a young poet doing the same. The few other commentators on this poem read it as a brief history, in three parts, of the poet's relation to the external world of nature. As a child or young boy, the poet is linked to the landscape by his "country senses," the five human senses being at one

with what they perceive (country) so that inner and outer have little meaning. Soon, though, the boy grows out of his childhood relation to nature and feels estranged from the landscape. The link of love having been broken, the poet uses his senses in his poems to try to re-establish the bonds of love with nature. However, the "green thumbs" that once made his fingers and the foliage one are forgotten. Now the fingers of the poet, they and the "halfmoon's vegetable eye" of the thumb's cuticle struggle to "mark" in the poem the identity between self and the universe. But both the "husk of young stars" and "handfull zodiac" of the hand (pared fingernails and the moon-like cuticle tips) and of the cosmos are but the fruits of "love in the frost" that is "pared and wintered by." What the eye fails to reunite in a relationship of love, the other, less vital senses also fail to do. The ears (also essential to poetic creation) "watch" as love is (ear-) "drummed away" to the "discordant beach" like Aphrodite forced back into her sea home. The "breeze and shell" that accompany love's retreat to a beach also signify the breath of poetic speech, the air that carries poetic sounds, and the intricately fashioned shell of the speaking poem that can only record love's loss. The tongue is a "lynx" (= links) tongue for it is the poet's tongue linking inner and outer, yet here it is "lashed to syllables" (whipped to pieces/strapped to mere words) and love's "wounds are mended bitterly" as self and world unite only in their mutual deaths. Finally, the nostrils "see" love's breath "burn like a bush," divine power in nature being self-consuming and ultimately separate from the senses.

The obvious synthesis noted here may unite the senses but it leads to no absolute vision; rather, singly and as a whole, the senses as embodied in poems seem unable to recover the poet's original identity

with nature when the tortured senses were contented "country senses" and his fingers all "green thumbs." In the poem's last four lines, however, the poet moves toward a relationship with the world even deeper than the spontaneous identity he enjoyed in childhood. Greater in rank than the peasant "country" senses is the poet's "noble" heart, an aristocrat who has "witnesses" in "love's countries" that will "grope awake" when the lesser "spying" senses have died into sleep or death ("blind sleep"). The five senses seem only able to perceive nature's physical form, but the heart, Thomas's expressivist source of poetry, unlike the purely physical senses or the intellect, can perceive nature in its visionary form, here called "all love's countries," not only the five countries of the five commonplace senses that inevitably age and die, but the further range of countries perceived by the "witnesses" of the intuitive, mystical heart which is itself "sensual" (i.e., capable of being its own sense organ whose agent of perception is love). Although not rigid in its categories or terminology, the poem seems to say finally that the heart is the source of visionary love, can "know" as the intellect can, and thus alone is capable of perceiving nature's final form, also visionary and sustained by love. Implicit also is the idea that the poet's own poetry of universal love, originating in the heart, will heal the divisions of self-consciousness and even surpass the child's brief identity with nature. Without analyzing the poem itself, Babette Deutsch provides a neat paraphrase of its theme: "it tells us . . . that as the youth becomes more self-conscious, his virginal sensuous delight in the world about him decays or is blurred or grows callous, but that the poet's emotional energy will restore and vivify his responsiveness and make him as a little child who needs no pass to paradise."[13] Not a child, however,

but, in the Romantic tradition of a movement from unity to disunity a final higher unity, the poet here achieves his own self-transcendence.

The power of love in the act of poetic creation is the subject of a similar poem, "Love in the Asylum" (P 169-70). The whole poem is a simultaneous description of inner and outer processes that are not only analogous but intermeshed. On one level the poem is a description of the poet's making love to his wife. Other poems in which Thomas fears that his wife's sexual dreams are with other men correspond to a similar fear expressed here in stanza 3 (l. 3). Yet clearly, on a second level, the poem is about a corresponding internal process -- the poet's union with the female in his own psyche, his anima, creative imagination, who grants him at the end of the poem a vision of original creation that restores the asylum's madman to psychic wholeness and provides a model for his own creative activity, the making of the later poems which he calls elsewhere "my love poems" (Ferris 252). Korg makes the sharp observation that this poem should be paired with "The Hunchback in the Park" for both poems deal with outcasts -- a hunchback and a madman -- both figures of the poet, who create ideal women in their heads to attain unity of being.[14] Stanza 1: the positioning of the phrase "not right in the head" so that it may modify either "stranger" (the female other) or the "house" begins the parallel development of corresponding inner and outer processes: human lovemaking and the incipience of the process of imaginative creation. She comes to "share" with the poet's male self a "room" -- Thomas's usual word for the place of poetic creation -- psyche/bedroom -- for he wrote most of his earlier poems in his boyhood room at No. 5 Cwmdonkin Drive or the one-room workshed at the boathouse in Laugharne. At any rate, the poet is mad, his head his asylum, and the girl, also mad and associated with birds, recalls

Romantic faith in non-rational experience and the use of birds (sky-lark/nightingale) as symbols of desired states of consciousness.

Stanzas 2-3: the bird-girl breaks down the poet's melancholy solipsism, keeping the outer dark outside but bringing into the doubting Thomas's "heaven-proof house" her "entering clouds" that, like clouds of glory, indicate her divine origins. Both "the night of the door" without and the "nightmarish room" within the poet's mind the girl "deludes," a word that seems to indicate her magical ability to cast spells, to transform, though it could also mean that she is a delusion of the poet's mad brain. A ghost or spirit of some sort, she revels in the "imagined oceans of the male wards" of the poet's brain, male and female selves becoming one.

Stanzas 4-5: keeping the outer dark away, she also "admits the delusive light," the illusion-creating, irrational light of poetic creation, into the "bouncing wall" of the poet's padded-room brain. A mad actress who walks the boards of the poet's madhouse brain, she is "possessed by the skies," owned by and obsessed by the divine character of unfallen nature whose agent to the poet, as well as his own anima, she is.

Stanza 6: in this last and by far the best stanza of the poem, the poet, after the preceding stanza's describing the wild ravings of anima and, secondarily, rankling wife, asks that his consummation with the female in poetic and, secondarily, sexual creation restore him to the unfallen state of the original creation:

> And taken by light in her arms at long and dear last
> I may without fail
> Suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars.

The poet is Christ again, the key word "suffer" inevitably recalling Christ's "suffer the little children to come unto me" (Cf. Altarwise,

Sonnet VII, l. 14!) and, by transposition, the poet's desire for ultimate vision is linked with the unified consciousness of the child. A poem on the incipient moment of the poetic process, "Love in the Asylum" conforms to the Romantic belief that imaginative action alone can achieve psychic wholeness and link inner and outer worlds -- here, poetic and sexual process and consummation, and a linkage of the created poem of the poet, child of the lovers, and universe of God. Certainly Romantic distrust of reason and frequent cultivation of the irrational is present in the very "madhouse" metaphor for inspiration and the various creative processes that are the subject of the poem.

One of Thomas's simplest and loveliest poems is another poem on poetry and poetry's connections with nature and love -- "In My Craft Or Sullen Art" (P 196-97). Critics almost universally admire this poem and often apply the term "romantic" in describing Thomas's attude toward poetry expressed therein. T. H. Jones calls it "a central poem in Thomas's work," Walford Davies "orthodoxly romantic" in diction, William Moynihan "a romanticized view of the poet," and Harry Williams an expression of "the romantic desire for all individuals to partake in the redemptive process."[15] Wordsworth's belief that the poet is a man speaking to other, common men and a bringer of "relationship and love" is born out in the poem and in critical commentary upon it. Walford Davies uses Wordsworth's very words to gloss lines 10-11 -- "the poet's rewards are the same as those of the lovers -- relationship, love, commitment to human limitations" (SP 127)" -- while Derek Stanford similarly points out Thomas's emerging theme in the later poems that love is the power released by the poet in the poetic process that links to other selves and to the world. As Stanford says, "the poem is a declaration of sympathy, of an attitude of identification with sympathy

in its highest form -- love."[16]

Stanza 1 (ll. 1-11): writing poems at night, I do not do so for public applause or financial reward but for the commonplace responsiveness in the hearts of lovers. In this stanza, the poet appears to us in several familiar Romantic guises: the solitary creator ("sullen" = solitary, stubborn, melancholy) whose creation is governed by the irrational in mind and nature, the "raging moon" of imagination and the night. His creative activity takes place simultaneously with the sexually creative activity of the "lovers" who "lie abed / With all their griefs in their arms," thus "sullen" like the poet and yet not sullen (not solitary though melancholy). The poet, like a common workman or possibly pregnant lover, is seen to "labour" by "singing light," that is, by the act of singing his light, by means of singing light, and by the illumination of the singing light. Each "singing light" in these possible readings of "by" being the light of imagination, nature (the moon), or even the buzzing electric light of his workshop. Estranged from society, the poet cannot imagine performing his art for "ambition or bread" or the transient popular fame of the music hall performer (ll. 8-9); "ivory stages" = university stages or the ivory towers of Oxbridge or the stage in the white /ivory/ lights or the stage of serious theatre as elitist, an upper-class diversion). Rather, the poet seeks relationship with "the lovers" and for payment only "the common wages / Of their most secret heart." Poetry, that is, provides and elicits a <u>private</u>, <u>emotional</u> response, and the common man is seen as the worthy object of attention. By an irony insisted upon in only the gentlest fashion, Thomas says that the poet in writing his love poems seeks only what the lovers seek -- relationship and

love -- yet, since true lovers have access in their ecstasy to love in its deepest or visionary form (the desire in their "most secret heart") they do not need to acknowledge the poet's achievement in releasing the power of love in his poems. But why does Thomas say that these poems are the result of "my craft or sullen art?" Does "or" imply that a poem is the product only of craft or of art? In "How to be a Poet" (PS 104) Thomas again defines poetry as "an Art or Craft . . . the rhythmic verbal expression of a spiritual necessity or urge." One explanation for his linkage of these two words is in the broadcast "On Poetry" (QEOM 169) where he distinguishes a poem's "worked-upon unmagical passages" from "those moments of magical accident" that transform mere craft into art, the "sharing, at its highest level, of personal experiences" (QEOM 168). In any case, "exercised," "Labour," "common wages," and "craft" make Thomas a poet of the common man, a day labour in verse, more than an aesthete on the one hand or a spokesman for high seriousness on the other.

Stanza 2 (ll. 12-20): not for those who stand above or apart from common human experience, but for the lovers, I write my poems. Repeating the "Not . . . / But . . ." structure of stanza 1, Thomas dissociates himself from "the proud man" self-exiled in his fear or unwillingness to establish emotional relationships with others and "the towering dead," the famous figures in history or literature (Milton? Yeats in his tower?) whose privileged lives granted them, like the emperor in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," "their nightingales and psalms." These people lived

> apart
> From the raging moon I write
> On these spindrift pages.

These highly suggestive lines create an outer picture of the moon con-

trolling the tides ("spindrift" = spray wind-blown from the tides) and an inner picture of imagination (irrational, emotive) ordering poetic creation. An absent comma allows us to read "the raging moon I write" as "I write the raging moon" of nature, imagination, and the lovers. Although a "craft" in Modernist fashion, Thomas's verses are also "spindrift" (spin/drift), for like Keats his name is writ in water, and anyway his poems are here primarily the vehicles of love, not "objects." Again, he concludes, he writes "for the lovers" who, already satisfied in their loves, "pay no praise or wages / Nor heed my craft or art." In this stanza a greater claim is made for the lovers who earlier lay in bed with their own private griefs in their arms but who now have "their arms / Round the griefs of the ages," an all-encompassing embrace that may mean that their private agonies are mankind's perennial ones or that, at its greatest, their love, like the poet's love poems, sympathetically incorporates grief into the lovers' union of their two selves.

The poem ends on a melancholy note, for, in spite of all his best efforts, the poet alone is aware, and isolated in his self-consciousness thereby, of the nature of his poetry and the fate of the lovers. He brings a relation, but, except by his own action in lines 10-11, receives no reciprocal, sympathetic understanding from the self-absorbed lovers. Nevertheless, the poem does not end as a defeatist statement, for the poet seems satisfied with his love-task and theme. In his essay "The Romantic Imagination," Stephen Spender, without commenting on Thomas or this poem, makes a statement about the Romantic concern with the intense experiencing of life that illuminates Thomas's poem on poets and lovers. Spender says: "I think one has to believe that suffering and intensity of living are themselves

forms of expression, and always have been. So that in the deeply felt experience of soldiers and lovers (for example) the consciousness of the poets, who have made language of their experience, is in communion with that intensity of living."[17]

A final poem on poetry to be considered is the mysterious "Lie Still, Sleep Becalmed" (P 194). Called a poem beyond final explication by Emery (WDT 184) who lists fifteen completely different readings by a seminar of his graduate students, it is certainly a haunting and evocative poem, stunning in its aural patterning over two quatrains and a sestet, and malleable enough to fit a variety of theses. Emery guesses that the poem is addressed to passengers trying to escape a sinking ship, possibly in wartime, or else is a spin-off of several poems by Whitman on the sea's luring of the poet to a lovely suicide (WDT 186-87). If his second reading is right, and the theme is the Romantic desire to be rid of the burden of self-consciousness (represented by the desire to unite with "the drowned"), then to the Whitman echoes listed by Emery one might add the beautiful lines on the call of the drowned in Tennyson's "Ulysses." Miller and Slote, in their long essay on parallels and influences in the poetry of Whitman and Thomas, cite "Lie Still" as an instance of both poets' beliefs that dreams are liberating, visionary experiences, irrational but significant modes of knowing in which the poetic self can roam far beyond its normal, conscious confines.[18] Moynihan offers a partial reading of the poem by suggesting that what is depicted is an ocean of blood, simultaneously Christ's and man's, the parallel "wound" of each being Christ's sacrificial blood and man's blood that is inevitably shed in his voyage to death. In that same direction, Rushworth Kidder presses more firmly for a purely Christian reading, rightly seeing the poem's title as an allusion

to the calming of the Sea of Galilee by Christ who spends the night there at sea with his fearful disciples. The unidentified "we" of the poem become the disciples who, having witnessed Jesus's miracle, fear having to face unflinchingly the terrifying reality of his divinity. Like Moynihan, however, Kidder must admit that the poem ends in despair and a kind of suicide.[19] The only other significant commentary on this poem is that of Tindall (RG 237-39), who, though equally unsure as the rest in pressing his interpretation of the poem in terms of Thomas's own views on the goals of the sort of poetry he wrote, seems closer to the center of the poem than the others; consequently, my reading follows upon his.

Undoubtedly, Tindall is right to see in the images of the poem many that refer to the process of poetic creation; equally certainly, Moynihan and Kidder are right to see a Christ figure active in the poem. Thomas has here returned to the common theme of his earlier poetry, that the life of Christ is an analogue to that of the poet's, not the other way around. Thus, the poem can be read as a conductor of two outer and two inner narratives: (1) the poet afloat in a boat on the sea of nature and (2) Christ afloat on the Sea of Galilee, and (3) the poet in the act of writing his poetry and (4) the poet asleep in his bed in a house by the sea, tormented with dreams about religion, suicide, and poetry. As a whole, the poem deals with the Poet-Christ figure's escape from his own self-consciousness and the inner and outer nightmares of dreams and the world.

Quatrain 1: an imperative and a declarative sentence spoken by an unspecified "we" to the protagonist. Exhorted to "lie still, sleep becalmed," the hero may be Christ asleep in the boat at sea, the Romantic poet questing on the sea of experience or the mind like the hero of

Alastor, the poet asleep in bed having bad dreams, or the same poet frustrated in his inability to make his poems the means of transforming the world. Called "sufferer with the wound / In the throat," this hero seems primarily the poet whose poems are emotional, expressivist poems, poems of the blood of a "wound" (the heart's blood, coughed up by the dying poet) that makes the poet, in the act of creating his poems, a Christ figure, shedding his blood for others. That the hero is "burning and turning" makes Kidder's Christian reading less plausible at this point, for Christ slept peacefully on the sea, whereas the poet, tossing and turning feverishly in bed or over his poems in rough draft, is more likely to be distraught. The followers ("we") have been on the "silent sea" of the unconscious or of nature beyond the reach of language. Now, however, they say they have discerned "the sound / That came from the wound wrapped in the salt sheet." Apparently the poet and the sound of his words are isolated, for once in Thomas, from the "silent sea" of inner and outer experience (dream/nature). The poet's "wound" in the throat from which his blood-poems pour is described as being in a "salt sheet." A highly suggestive image, the "salt sheet" can be the sheet of the sail of the poet's (or Christ's) boat on the inner/outer seas of his voyage, the tear-stained bedsheets of the weeping poet oppressed by his nightmare, or the sheet of paper for writing poetry over which he weeps salt tears.

Quatrain 2: even more mysterious than quatrain 1, these lines describe an act of self-destruction that ends in the redemption of "the drowned" (= the dead in nature / repressed portions of the psyche). Again, Kidder's Christian reading seems less plausible here for the storm grows worse, not better, and line 2 would require that the disciples speaking in union as "we" have detailed knowledge of the exact

nature of Christ's crucifixion. On the other hand, who are these choral speakers? They may be either the poet's readers who look to him for answers, or, internally, they may be agents of some terrifying power deep in the mind that the poet's imagination needs but fears to release to perform its miracles of resurrection. The "mile off moon" must be, as Tindall guesses, imagination "under" which the choral "we" reside. The "loud wound" of the poet's throat in the act of poetic composition releases and redeems the "sea" of the psyche and nature, both now "flowing like blood" as the poet completes his sacrificial, sacramental act. Following the Christ analogy, the poet must die in the act of redeeming. Thus, we are told, "the salt sheet broke in a storm of singing," the poet's boat loses its guiding sails which are torn off that the storm winds might sing through them -- an image combining the Romantic metaphors of the wind-harp and the correspondent breeze. The "salt sheet" is also the paper containing the poem (similarly called "spindrift" poetry in "In My Craft") which is <u>destroyed</u>, <u>released</u> or which <u>begins</u> (all these - readings of "broke") to sing its song that raises the dead: "The voices of all the drowned swam on the wind." In its depiction of the self-destroying poet whose self-destruction releases love into the world, this poem recalls Hart Crane's "The Broken Tower" (1932).[20]

The sestet: lines 1-3 of the sestet should be in quotation marks, spoken directly (at last) by the poet-hero, followed by the fearful commentary of the choral "we" (ll. 4-6). Probably the poet's spoken lines occur simultaneously with the action in quatrain 2 (ll. 2-4), for they describe the poet's heroic defiance yet also acceptance of the conditions of existence. Let the "wind" of inner poetic inspiration and outer nature bring the poet and his poems to their inevitable end.

Having already created his poems of redemption that have been sacrificed to bring on the very storm (= imaginative action under the "mile off moon") that stirs up the sea and releases the drowned, the poet as a man becomes but a "wandering boat" whose "wound" is the already inexorably ordered path of development of his life and poetry:

> Open a pathway through the slow sad sail
> . . . . . .
> For my voyage to begin to the end of my wound.

Not a single poem, but all of his poems make up a quest and a long act of redemptive self-sacrifice. In the poem's final three lines, the choral "we" hears an intermingling of the poet's sheets of poems and nature (the sea) no longer "silent" but full of singing: "We heard the sea sound sing, we saw the salt sheet tell." Yet whether fearful readers or, more likely, unnamed but terrifying powers of mind and nature that the poet, a Prometheus or Faust, dares to conjure up by his "magic," the choral "we" warns the poet that he had better not "awaken" to his own poetic Christhood or else the poet will not only release "the drowned" from their deaths but these mysterious powers as well: "Lie still, sleep becalmed, hide the mouth in the throat, / Or we shall obey, and ride with you through the drowned." A sort of inverted dejection ode, this poem fears not a falling off of the poet's transforming power but an inability to control that power's ultimate effects once it is unleashed in the world and mind. Magic casements may open onto fairylands or onto nightmare worlds.

The Marriage and Fatherhood Poems: 1936-45. Unlike the poems on poetics, most of which are successful definitions of Thomas's own views on the relation of imagination, nature, and love, a group of ten poems, spread over a decade, that deal with Thomas's own fiery marriage to Caitlin and his subsequent fatherhood have been almost universally con-

demned by the critics as failures. Tindall calls these poems "coagulated" (RG 193) while Kidder sees in them evidence of "reintegrated disintegration," a patchwork of fragments, a "whipped mixture of oil and water" remaining in "unstable union."[21] Kidder's appropriate metaphors for poems dealing with the self's relation to that most fascinating and frustrating "other" -- a lover -- in this case, also a spouse, are further amplified by Korg's comment that Thomas's key problem in these poems was reconciling his desire to release visionary love in poetry and in sexual mysticism with the turbulent realities of marriage. Korg feels that in these poems Thomas misapplies the high rhetoric and dense imagery of his early poems of the relationship between self and cosmos to "a transient emotional episode" -- an argument, a reconciliation, a lovemaking -- with his wife. Trying to discover cosmic implications in a lovers' quarrel or ecstatic union or reunion, Thomas somehow failed to bring it off in the majority of these poems.[22]

Ironically, these poems on which most critics agree in disliking were considered by Thomas to be among his best. Thomas worked fanatically hard on these poems, especially in the 1936-39 period into which most of them fall. He called them his "exhausters" as opposed to his "opossums," shorter poems and poems revised in the later thirties from the Notebooks. One clue to the importance Thomas attached to these toiled-over poems is the deep emotional attachment he had to Caitlin. In Chapter III, I surveyed the evidence in support of the view that Thomas actually wanted to see in Caitlin a muse-figure, an embodiment of Love which his poems were supposed to release into the world. Equally certainly, as Caitlin records in her memoirs of their married life, Leftover Life to Kill, their marriage was often a rhythmic alteration between fierce physical encounters and wildly passionate reunions (Leftover 34-35). Yet T. H. Jones

is correct in saying that in spite of their frequent spats "Thomas's marriage was one of the most fundamentally important things that ever happened to him."[23] Not only his muse, lover, and in some ways, mother, Caitlin, a natural Bohemian and former companion of the painter Augustus John, saw herself, as Thomas liked to see himself, as an outlaw from society. This is confirmed by Caitlin's sister, Nicolette Devas, in her own autobiography: "Caitlin and Dylan treated society as they treated each other. They ganged together against society: a couple of outlaws."[24] Finally, Thomas seems to have believed that religious vision could be attained through sexual intercourse. According to Evelyn Broy, many of Thomas's stories and poems deal with the poet's desire to achieve an "interaction of . . . the religious and the sexual" but most of them end with the disappointing failure of sex to lead to vision. Broy speculates that Thomas confused his poetic and personal lives to the extent that he expected sex with Caitlin to lead to the vision that he only intermittently claimed to have achieved in his poems (as "Love in the Asylum").[25] Whether or not one considers these marriage poems poetic failures, they do testify to the poet's actual belief that relations between the self and the world or an "other" could be established and altered in the very act of writing poems about them. Thomas's inability to make these poems "work" in the same fashion as the earlier self/cosmos poems must have contributed to his final abandonment of much of his earlier imagistic obscurity and density and his turning to reminiscence and to childhood and to nature as perceived by the child as important subjects in his post-war poems.

The earliest of the poems in the "marriage group" is "It is the Sinners' Dust-Tongued Bell" (P 130-31). Opinion is divided on the nature of the religious imagery in the poem. Kidder and others feel that Christian rites are used here to illuminate, by witty analogy, purely

secular concerns; on the other hand, George Woodcock points specifically to this poem as evidence for Thomas's displacing religious attitudes. Beginning here, he argues, Thomas's "use of Christian symbolism becomes diffused, so that, instead of little images torn from the sayings of the chapel preachers studding his poems like so much booty, we find a more mature religious sense spreading through the substance of his verse and bringing it a new and hieratic dignity."[26] E. Glyn Lewis detects both a sacramental attitude toward human love and a corresponding disgust caused by the poet's perception of impermanence: "here time is identified with the sexual act which, holy in itself, is translated by consciousness of time into an abhorent experience," though the poet's abhorence here seems mild compared to earlier poems on sexuality.[27] Probably, these critics are all noting Thomas's double perspective in the poem: a desire to depict a sacramental nature whose central act of communion is sexual intercourse between humans yet a desire also to record unflinchingly the human experience of change. Commenting on the early prose, Walford Davies brings in "It is the Sinners'" as a parallel example of "Romantic Agony" which he defines: "There is a response here to the ambiguous nature of life. The embarrassed juxtaposition of Christian and pagan elements gives a picture of nature unsure of herself. The dark frustration of a mind unsure of a rational, ordained universe, the strong awareness of emblematic death and decay, causes Thomas to body forth a strong anti-life imagination" (EPW xiv). In general terms, the poem is about the conflict between two religions: the religion of Christ and the religion of human love, itself its sacrament, and the relation of both religions to the natural world.

Stanza 1: when my efforts to achieve union with the divine through sexual passion fail, my church of love is suddenly transformed into the

old, guilt-ridden church of Welsh Puritanism, a church that seems ruled by two satanic overlords, Time and Grief. Oppressed by his sense of death that even corrupts the act of sex, now seen as the deathly act of the guilty ("the sinners' dust-tongued bell"), the poet has a desire to return to orthodox belief. The act of intercourse is transformed from an act that leads to transcendence to a sort of Black Mass whose priestly celebrants are satanic. Time, with cloven heel, is a "sulphur priest" who turns the lovers' passionate "brand of ashes" into a "black isle" in the church of gloom. The other priest, Grief, removes the "altar ghost" from the lovers, their sense of participation in divinity during consummation. The phallic and sacramental "candle" of their love is blown dark by a wind from hell ("a fire wind") thus turning the lovers back into sorry sinners within a Christian church.

Stanza 2: glumly back in church again, the poet sees that Time governs not only his private sacramental loving but also the church of orthodox believers. The "choir minute" of the believers is lost in the overriding "hour chant" of Time. Time's church of death has only one saint, the "coral saint" made up of thousands of packed skeletons of tiny sea creatures, a growing ridge of death. The "foul sepulchre" of the forever dead Christ was watered into resurrection by the "salt grief" of believers whose religion is only an illusory response to time. Similarly, a "prayer wheel" is turned only by the "whirlpool" of time and lower nature. Symbols of that nature and its changeableness are the moon and sun. Seen as they sink over the watery horizon ("moonfall and sailing emperor" -- the sun god on his nightly underwater sea journey), they, dependent on divine power for their maintenance, grow, in a good image "pale as their tide-print" when they hear that the Christian cathedral has drowned in the waters of the world where its sunken bell chimes out

the passing hours that mark the newly uncontested reign of Time.

Stanza 3: stripped too now of the orthodox church to which he had returned (st. 1) after the destruction of the church of love by Time, the poet returns to his religion of love, whereby, in the act of creating a child (and possibly, too, a poem) he overcomes time and redeems nature. At the first, after the drowning of the cathedral in stanza 2, nature is "loud and dark" as at Christ's death, in stark opposition to the "dumb flame" of sexual/poetic creation, the final rallying point above the sea of time. The lovers' inner "weather of fireworks" balances the outer, winter weather of storm and snow; the lovers' "cathedral calm in the pulled house" of the temple-womb balances the drowned cathedral of Christianity. In a combined ritual of exorcism and baptism, the poet, in the grief of poetic and sexual creation ("book and candle") "christens" his child (and poem) as "the cherub time," mysteriously turning his enemy Time against itself in the act of creation, the "emerald, still bell" of sea-green and green youth. As a result of creating a child and poems that capture childhood consciousness, the poet redeems nature from time: "and from the pacing weather-cock / The voice of bird on coral prays." Symbol of time become symbol of divine presence in nature, the bird stands on "coral," earlier "Time's coral saint" of death.

Stanza 4: the child's vision of nature is an unfallen one, and, assuming imaginative power, he raises up the sunken cathedral to reveal to us a nature infused with divinity. Born "a white child" in the pale, drained winter of fallen nature, the child seems to arise simultaneously out of the sunken cathedral and the cathedral-womb in order to enter by imagination the world of upper nature (he "scales the blue wall of spirits"). The "blank" winter that bore the child gives way to the "dark-

skinned summer" that reveals "the child in colour" in benevolent nature. That the child is also (if only intermittently so indicated) a poem is clear from the statement that the child rings out the sunken cathedral bells ("Shakes . . . / Ding dong from the mute turrets") by "sorcerer's insect woken." From earlier poems we know that Thomas sees imagination as a kind of magic or sorcery that transforms the cold external fact, the "insect." Here, Thomas is saying that the child, in its journey out of winter is "woken" by the poet's imagination to perceive nature in its visionary form. So doing, the child rings the bells of the still sunken cathedral; that is, divinity remains sunken in nature like the cathedral (unlike orthodoxy) but the child, who perceives nature as holy, can make the underwater bells ring out.

Stanza 5: hardly undercutting stanza 4 as some critics think, stanza 5 presents a Romantic nativity, obviously echoing Milton's famous poem that Thomas loved, but whose saviour here is the Romantic figure of the child, brought into being by the poet's love and imaginative powers, not by God. In an oddly obvious way, Thomas hands us a key to the poem when he identifies the church time as the "rascal of our marriage," our referring to Caitlin, or, if the child is a poem, to the muse. Written before marriage or fatherhood, however, the child here is imaginary, though Thomas did marry Caitlin about this time. Product of the "animal bed" (animal = anima again?) and the "holy room" of womb, the child and the redeemed world he perceives or causes to be are worshipped by lovers who kneel to the child's "hyleg image" (hyleg = planet ruling one's nativity). Like the magi, here "love's sinners" bring aphrodisiacs (WDT 67) to the child while the parents of the child, "plagued" by all the visitors and by their own sorrows and pains of bringing forth the child, are served by these presents. Their

child is "the urchin grief," child made out of their state of grief, also a sea-urchin who rings the sunken cathedral (divinity in nature) and who is thus a sea-creature and merman as well as human child. In many ways, as Davies says, a contorted, tormented poem, it still fights through to a conclusion that shows it to be a poem whose central action is a depiction of the agonizing shift from an insufficient Christian cosmology to an interim period of visionary gloom and materialistic despair to a Romantic cosmology that is a displacement of the Christian one that triumphs briefly (and satanically) in the first stanza of the poem.

Along with "It is the Sinners' Dust-Tingued Bell," probably "Unluckily for a Death" (P 147-49) is the most successful of the poems in the marriage group. Filled with sacramental imagery displaced from Catholicism, the poem has been singled out by a number of critics as a key poem in Thomas's later poetry where in sacramental relationship between lovers or between the poet and nature is dominant.[28] Radically different in its final form from an earlier version in which a more sanguine view of carnal love predominated, the final version, as Vernon Watkins commented, "shows that all the changes made in its rewriting were movements away from ironical, and towards religious, statement" (LVW 64). The entangled syntax and confusingly placed clauses of the poem may have occasioned Thomas's remark in the letter to Watkins containing the poem, "don't bother too much about the details of it . . . it's the spirit of this poem that matters" (LVW 64).

Stanza 1 and 2 (ll. 1-10): all twenty-four of these lines making a single poetic sentence, Thomas is saying in complex syntax that love which can reproduce itself without conjugal relations (the phoenix) as well as love which denies the flesh in favor of a completely spiritual

love (the nun) are inferior forms of love to that conjugal love which is its own sacrament and is a perfect fusion of the self and the other, as well as the divine and the mortal, in a single holy act. Stanza 1: death is unlucky if he is waiting for me to make the mistake of trying to defeat him by putting any trust in the "phoenix" Christ-like (possibly onanistic) symbol of sexual regeneration or resurrection associated with my funeral pyre that burns up sins and the days of my life in a Christian context (ll. 1-3). Similarly, death is unlucky if he thinks that I shall channel my love into ascetic self-denial of the body in hopes of attaining here or hereafter a purely spiritual love (ll. 4-14). Such a love is that of "the woman in shades," a nun in her dark habit or her communing with the shades of the spiritual world. Like statues of stone whose shape and stony matter describe her coldness, she is "saint carved" yet walking among the graves of the dead who push us ("scudding") towards themselves, she is unalterably "sensual" and, by the laws of nature, a devotee of "my self" the male (l. 6). Nevertheless, the poet says that his powers are too weak to cause the nun to release the suppressed lust within her that is unnaturally sublimated. Her mouth, cold as the clay lips of the dead, is immune to his kiss, nor is his passion-enflamed forehead enough to hold her, nor are love's breathless winds strong enough to break upon "the choir and cloister / In the sun strokes of summer" that lead to the birth of "sons."

Stanza 2: against the inadequacies of nun- and phoenix-loves, the poet places the sacramental love of man and woman, a love combining spiritual and physical, an internalizing of the myth of Eden, Creation, and Christ. In spite of the Welsh Puritan objections to his church of sacramental love ("sea banged guilt / . . . the cloud against love") the poet's "holy lucky body" enters the woman's womb, the "mill of the midst"

that grinds the flower and crushed the grape of their sacrament (cf. "This Bread I Break"). Then, as night descends, the star of Venus rises ("the still star in the order of the quick") to bless these members of "secular" orders. Composed of body and spirit ("your every / Inch and glance") the woman is divinity, not simply a symbol of it or an avenue by which the transcendent may be known. Her womb is God and a church as well:

> the wound
> Is certain god, and the ceremony of souls
> Is celebrated there, and communion between suns.

Each person's body and blood are sacraments; "wound" of womb (and penis as well) is Christ. In the last four lines of stanza 2, the poet reiterates his objections to the inadequate loves of the phoenix ("the bird") and the nun ("the saint in shades") who are "lonely" and "death biding." Rather, as the vulva of the female sex organ opens to either side, the poet finds another divine service there to keep him from these inadequate loves: "the endless breviary / Turns of your prayed flesh."

Stanza 3: an elaboration of the same themes of stanzas 1-2, this stanza adds to the asexually regenerating phoenix a host of real or mythical animals that are asexual or are the product of unlike parents and thus unable to reproduce themselves. This list includes a "tigron" (offspring of tiger and lion or else the neuter /-on/ form of a tiger) who lives in "androgynous dark," she-mules (from a female horse and a male ass), minotaur (part man, part bull), the platypus (wrongly included, but seemingly a sterile crossing of a duck and a mole-like animal). All these are seen as sharing an inability to reproduce by copulation. Next, the inadequacy of the nun's sexual abstinence is accosted, her longing for the purely transcendental being beyond the poet's comprehension, her bloated out of proportion giant "continence"

and the poet's thereby overly developed "great crotch" of lust being two deformities created by her chastity. Similarly, the phoenix's desire to be "herald / And heaven crier" in his fiery ascent up from the island of earth is dismissed. Finally, in a plain statement that ends the stanza, Thomas sums up the preceding thirty-nine torturously constructed lines:

> All love but for the full assemblage in flower
> Of the living flesh is monstrous or immortal,
> And the grave its daughters.

The "monstrous" love is that of the phoenix and the other animals in Thomas's zoo of those who do not reproduce bisexually; the "immortal," of course is the nun and her love for the transcendent. Desiring the fertile union of opposites, the poet can only reassert, in stanza 4, his preference for a sacramental love between man and woman that is natural-supernatural, not mere lust nor subsidiary to some form of heavenly love available in its purest form only in the Christian afterlife.

Stanza 4: asserting again that the loves of phoenix and nun will fail (ll. 1-5), the poet turns to his lover. By entering her womb he will attain Eden ("your mortal garden") and he will walk therein "with immortality at my side like Christ the sky." Uniting mortal and immortal, the poet attains Christhood and Eden in the experience of divine-human love. Sacramental love causes nature's fallen form to vanish before the newly cleansed doors of perception of the poet, cleansed by the "translating eyes" of the woman. Upper nature, nature in its visionary form (= "Christ the sky") becomes visible and the poet witnesses the unveiling of pristine nature whose stars are like human children (each one a Christ) that may be born of the lovers' union: "The young stars told me, / Hurling into beginning like Christ the child." Emery quotes Blake's view that "'All deities reside in the human breast'" to explain

Thomas's attitude toward love in this poem. The Christian myth is secularized and internalized in Romantic fashion (although the secular/spiritual and internal/external divisions become meaningless at the point of consummation) and the poem ends with its best lines, the poet's plea to the woman who is his lover, maternal nature, and the source of all creation:

> O my true love, hold me.
> In your every inch and glance is the globe of genesis spun,
> And the living earth your sons.

Although not allied here with imagination as in earlier poems on poetry, or, with any emphasis, on the outer landscape, love as a sacrament that unites the self to the other and heals various dualisms is beginning to emerge as a central theme that will ultimately put the poet in the position of celebrating priest of nature in the later landscape poems whose sacramental imagery is anticipated distantly by various notebook poems but more nearly by "Unluckily for a Death." The story of human lovers who achieve the state of Eden by their own powers, the poem is, as Emery says, the most explicit and powerful statement of Thomas's philosophy of love (WDT 64).

Two short poems in the marriage group serve as transitions between poems that view love as a successful means of overcoming the self/world (or self/other) division and those that rail against the failure of conjugal love due to the woman's reluctance or her betrayal of the man. The first of these poems, "Not from this Anger (P 134), a radical revision of a poem in the February Notebook, was occasioned apparently by Caitlin's refusal to have sex with Thomas. Tindall reports that Thomas called the poem "unsatisfactory" (RG 163). Since his goal in these marriage poems was to show that conjugal love between two people had cosmic implications, the failure of that love should be shown to

have apocalyptic effects on the external world. The only critic to comment on these implications is Yeomans who sees this poem as an instance of Thomas's desire to establish "personal-mythopoeic equations" and who favorably discerns in the poem that "the mythopoeic seems an appropriate projection of the personal."[29]

Stanza 1: my wife's refusal to have sex leads to my dejected detumescence and sexual aridity; furthermore, her refusal precedes the conception of a child which could unite us and unite the halves of the world. Not a self-consciously witty poem like Donne's "The Sunne Rising," this poem is serious in trying to establish metaphorical identity between lover and lover and the lovers and the world. The refused penis is a lame flower and was a beast erect to drink the floods of her womb which, unfertilized, is a wasteland. Nature seems to depend on the lovers' fruitfulness for its own sustenance. Her pregnant womb would be like a fertile ocean of weeds, its foetus a child of "tendril hands" that dissolve the border between the human and the natural. This nature child connects the "two seas" of sperm and amniotic fluid, and also the Atlantic and Pacific of the outer world.

Stanza 2: more clearly than in stanza 1, the poet says that the consummation of human love is a ceremony that sustains the outer world as well as the power that produces the child and even the poet's own inner/outer uniting poems. Through the window behind the disaffected lovers' bed, a "square of sky sags" over the "circular smile" (made up of two half circles of separate smiles) that are "tossed" between the lovers like a ball. Since this window is also "behind my head," an inner sky and sun seem to match the outer sky (frowning) and the sun ("the golden ball") that "spins out of the skies" for outer nature in its happiest form will collapse if sacramental love, as described in

"Unluckily," dies. Repeating the syntax of the opening of stanza 1, the poet again says that his anger caused by her refusal, that, like a striking underwater bell is an unraised sunken cathedral of sacramental love whose bells ring out like poems, leads to a failure to create "that mouth" of the nature child or the poet's spoken poems that "burn along my eyes" ("along" = the border between inner and outer that poem or child sustains). Looking at her now, he finds his lover reflected in the "mirror" of his eyes, not creatively transformed into something greater. Obviously a slight poem, "Not from this Anger" is distinguished by its theme: the inner world of sacramental love sustains outer nature in its visionary form and unites the lovers to it.

A similar poem in theme and brevity is "On A Wedding Anniversary" (P 161). Classifiable as a war poem as well as a marriage poem, this one investigates the relationship of war to lovers whose love has soured and has parted them in two. Inner and outer worlds are again united by love, as the "torn" sky matches the "ragged anniversary" of the lovers whose first three years of marriage were like a long harmonious procession down the aisle of the church where they wed (st. 1). Two "patients" in the madhouse asylum of "Love," a healer, they cry out as their house of love is threatened by clouds of inner distrust and the external clouds of falling bombs -- German planes that hold craters, potentially, to destroy the lovers' actual house" (st. 2). This "wrong rain" of bombs and doubts, however, causes the lovers to unite in the dual blaze of renewed passion and death by firestorm: "They come together whom their love parted." As a result, their self-sacrificing love unites lover to lover and both separate selves to the external world: "The windows pour into their heart / And the doors burn in their brain." Fire and water (the verbs), inner and outer of self

and other (linked by windows, doors) become one in the plural possessive pronouns' singular nouns (heart, brain). Oddly, an earlier version of this poem exists (WDT 177) which some critics think a better poem than Thomas's revision. In that version, stanza 1 contrasts the inner, imaginative power of the poet with the anti-human language of the outer, wartime world. Bombs or civilian screams or military commands, the "cold, original voices of the air / Crying, burning, into the crowd" do so while the poet's ineffectual "hermit, imagined music sings / Unheard through the street of flares." Even "told birds" (told by the cold voices) can only watch each "starfall" to see if it is a falling star or falling bombs: nature, like imagination, seems helpless against threats from the forces of destruction. Ending with the lovers divided, unlike the revision, the earlier version of the poem has the lovers' separation and madness causes the sun to fall (st. 4, l. 3) as in "Not from this Anger"; then the "raiding moon" that lights the way for bombers ends a poem in which the powers of nature, imagination, and love have failed to fend off the lethal "pressure of reality."

A more complex look at the consequence of the failure of sacramental human love is "Into Her Lying Down Head" (P 157-59). Another poem derived from marital troubles with Caitlin, this specific poetic complaint is that in sleep Caitlin dreams of imaginary male lovers who exclude the poet from the crucial consummation of physical (therefore, divine, in Thomas) love. Egocentrically conceived, this poem seems to argue that the poet's particular needs in his inspiring mate dominate her own needs for an ideal mental lover, a lover that Thomas applauded as a good thing for the poet in poems like "The Hunchback in the Park" and "Love in the Asylum." Apparently, Thomas is saying that unity of being within himself, between the lovers, and between the lovers and

nature depends upon a union of the imagined and the real. This view is supported by a rare paraphrasing of one of his own poems (this one) in a letter to Vernon Watkins: "All over the world love is being betrayed, as always, and a million years have not calmed the uncalculated ferocity of each betrayal or the terrible loneliness afterwards. Man is denying his partner man or woman and whores with the whole night, begetting a monstrous brood; one day the brood will not die when the day comes but will hang on to the breast and the parts and squeeze his partner out of bed . . . It's a poem of wide implications, if not of deep meanings" (LVW 92). If, as in "Unluckily for a Death" and "Not from this Anger" sacramental human love sustains nature, then that love's betrayal by imagined lovers leads to the double distortion of inner nightmare and outer disruption when the imaginary lover and its offspring fail to stay within the boundaries of sleep but rather foray into the daylight hours.

Section I (ll. 1-23): through orifices of maidenhead, eye, and ear a woman's imaginary lovers enter her body (ll. 1-6); the erotic power of nature and the unconscious rose mightily to take her, her conjured images of that power ranging from kings and queens to famous lovers of those betrayed in love or attractive persons passed on the street or stair (ll. 7-15); behind all these images a single young "blade" scythed the hayfield of her thighs (ll. 16-19); all England seemed her love, the giant Albion, who brought her the new sleep of lost innocence and pregnancy (ll. 20-23). The wide-ranging historical and mythological analogies to the woman's psychic betrayal of the poet reinforce his prose summary on the universal significance of individual human lovemaking. The imaginary lovers are the poet's "enemies," an army that invades to the drum-beat of the "rippled drum" of the woman's ear. Noah's dove becomes a "man-bearing" phallus while the erotic power

of nature and the mind are imaged as whales: "whales unreined from the green grave / In fountains of origin gave up their love." Her lovers include Don Juan, young Lear, Samson with all his hair, and Queen Catherine of Russia. Love is compared not only to the harvesting of whole fields but to whole islands -- "the enamouring island" of Circe or the Isle of Man -- and to whole countries -- "Man was the burning England she was sleep-walking" -- as if she were becoming one with Albion himself. Her pregnancy is a vast range of "acorned sand" as well. As Thomas said, it is a poem of "wide implications" far beyond its sources in his own jealousy or Caitlin's dreams.

Section II (ll. 1-23): meditating on the consequences of the woman's betrayal of him in her dreams, the poet finds that their sacramental love has been turned into a satanic sacrament instead. As a character in his own poem, the poet now first apprehends his lover's somnambulent betrayal by the "numberless tongue" of the lovers who write in "numbers" like the poet. His "faith" in that divine and physical love is lost and phallic nightmare rules the inner room of her heart and outer room of their house: "And darkness hung the walls with baskets of snakes." Her fantasy lover is both bestial and superhuman (l. 6), like the "oceanic lovers" that she imagined in her adolescence when sexual awakening stole her innocence, and he now enjoys her "good/ Night." Their faithless lovemaking turns all of nature into an ampitheatre, she in a white gown crying out the lines "from the middle moonlit stages" of the night and her thighs to the audience of the "tiered and hearing tide." Importantly, Thomas is saying that if sacramental human love sustains unfallen nature then human betrayal of that love must also affect nature that responds to human action. The ceremony of souls in the intercourse of "Unluckily" is replaced here by what Emery

calls "her nightmare black mass" (WDT 80). Bride and imaginary lover are "celebrating" the dubious miracle of their own "blood-signed assailings" and "vanished marriages" that exclude the poet. A harpy-like "nightpriest" with "foul wingbeat" solemnizes her "holy unholy hours" with her lover who, being "the always anonymous heart" as well as (earlier) a "super-or-near-man" seems to sin most greatly in not being human and thus individual.

Section III (ll. 1-23): elaborating largely on how betrayal of human love leads directly to similar betrayals in nature, the poet takes us through analogies between the human lovers and two sandgrains, a she bird, grassblade, and stone, lamenting at the end his final exclusion from the woman's dream because only his union with her could reverse the similar process of betrayal in nature. Lines 1-9: Blake's "eternity in a grain of sand" seems deliberately echoed in Thomas's picture of love in nature, just prior to its suffering the consequences of human betrayal: "Two sandgrains together in bed / Head to heaven-circling head." Yet now they too "singly lie" in their bed, covered by the blanket of sea and night and now "with no names," made anonymous by the woman's "anonymous beast" of a lover who takes away the source of inspiration for the poet's naming words and individualizing human love. Sea shells, called, like the sandgrains, in an earlier version "helled and heavened" (LVW 94) and now "domed and soil-based" utter the primal sin that causes nature and man to fall into materialism and disunity:

> One voice in chains declaims
> The female, deadly, and male
> Libidinous betrayal.

The image of sandgrain and shell disappearing under the sea (cf. the inner sea of the "oceanic" whale-like lover in dreams) figures forth as well the submergence of visionary nature in the generating sea of fallen

nature: "Golden dissolving under the water-veil" (l. 9). In the following lines, the division that has come to grain and shell comes to other members of nature as well: a she bird forgets her mate to dream of a paradise of death and sex in the killing claws of a hawk, a grassblade in a meadow feels estranged from its fellows, and a stone in a hill feels lost and imprisoned among its companion rocks (ll. 10-16). Human loss of love and natural loss are intertwined.

The poem ends (ll. 17-23) with the poet's final lament over his absence from the ceremony of sacramental love. He is "torn up" and mourning in the "sole night" where she is also "alone and still" though unconscious of her betrayal or the poet's loss. What she sought to do with "the incestuous secret brother" her dream lover is what only love-making with her human lover could accomplish: the desire "to perpetuate the stars" (stars = children/heavenly bodies in Thomas). The imaginary lovers, by separating two human lovers, myriad natural lovers (bird, stone, etc.) and the divine from the material in all, deserve their final name -- "the severers" -- who "bury their dead" of imaginary, infertile sperm in the woman's sleep. In an earlier version, the poem's final lines equally clearly associate human love and reproduction, divinity-in-woman, and the sustaining of an external nature informed by goodness:

> Will his lovely hands let run the daughters and sons of
> the blood?
> Will he rest his pulse in the built breast of impossible
> great god?
> Over the world uncoupling the moon rises up to no good
> (LVW 95)

Symbol of love, nature, and imagination, the moon, by her betrayal, turns evil and nature itself is torn apart like the human lovers -- "the world uncoupling"!

The final major poem dealing directly with marriage is the one which

Thomas, unlike his critics, valued most: "I Make This in a Warring Absence" (P 131-33), a poem that occupied almost all of 1937 and many of whose lines, Watkins reports, Thomas worked over and over for days (LVW 30). Thomas's own rather long prose paraphrase of this poem exists (SL 186), and, in addition to showing that in his darkest images and syntax he had a discernible intent formulatable in general statements, this paraphrase remains the best commentary on the poem, Tindall's alone excepted. Again, the theme is the cosmic consequences of Caitlin's refusal of sexual love (original title: "Poem for Caitlin"), but critical opinion is divided. Tindall, usually favorable to Thomas's poems, finds it "this well-intentioned, muddy poem" and Korg complains that "Thomas applies the style of his early mystic period to a transient emotional episode." Holbrook sees the poem clearly as a matter of self/world relations, but he reduces Thomas to infantilism with a battery of psychologists who support his views on this poem: "The inner need to create and give in love is imposed on the external world: Dylan Thomas feels that he has created his world and lives in it. It is therefore intolerable when the object [Caitlin] . . . does not obey the idealising impulse." On the affirmative side, Moynihan finds that Thomas has successfully linked self and cosmos in the poem: "Thomas here sees a domestic occurrence as having immense implications. The universe is involved in the actions of the couple, and the couple is involved in the actions of the universe."[30] Possibly Korg is right in saying that the clotted images and constantly shifting metaphors are less successful here than in the earlier poems, for this poem seems closer to poems like "I, In My Intricate Image" and "My World is Pyramid" than it is to "Unluckily for a Death" and "Into Her Lying Down Head."

Stanzas 1-2: in imagery of sailing into harbour and entering a

mansion, Thomas says that Caitlin's "pride" in him as a sexually desirable mate (and, secondarily, as a poet) has vanished, leaving him devastated, and causing herself to be reduced from a woman to a child. Announcing his poem ("this") as the result of the "warring absence" of his lover (st. 1, l. 1), Thomas immediately switches from military to nautical metaphors: every moment of the time of their love is like a suicidal person with stones around his neck, ready to jump into the sea. Each of these minute-moments, a harbour for the poet's love- and poet-telling tongue, slips the "quaystones" to drift at sea for the woman's former praise for and pride in the poet's phallic and poetic powers ("mast and fountain") that was enhanced by her caressed womb ("the handshaped ocean"), his "proud sailing tree that grew up through her sexual organ that kept in the womb's waters like a breakwater ("the last vault and vegetable groyne") and that led up and in to her "marrow-columned heaven" has been turned (st. 2) into scorn. Scorned by the woman, the poet is only a "weak house" to her locked mansion, her pride in him thrown into corners, a matter of a few cold words of breath, a single weed from all her ocean articulating her disdain, the poet a dope-head, a scarecrow, scattered to the winds (st. 2, ll. 1-2). Furthermore, her pride and refusal of the poet's sexual demands inactivate her sexual allure, her moon-like breasts that rise and fall like tides being "looped" and her "sea-hymen" being "roped" like a rodeo steer. Finally, her refusal reduces her to a child, drawn to her mother like iron filaments to a magnet, where she becomes an infantile, suckling babe: "Bread and milk mansion in a toothless town."

Stanza 3: following Thomas's paraphrase of this obscure stanza as a linking of opposites that the woman's hot-and-cold attitudes toward sex bring to his attention, we can make out a general intent. The woman

causes me to feel, he says, that a nettle (Christ's thorn?) is innocent and a pigeon toy made of silk is guilty, that virgins rise like Venus from the sea on their shells yet do so among "molested rocks," that the "frank, closed pearl" of virginity is juxtaposed to Eliotic "sea-girls' lineaments" or fatal women that reflect light in their sexually suggestive "siren-printed caverns." The sexually aggressive poet's guilt at his phallic, "shameful oak" contrasts the woman's renewed sexual interest that " omens / Whalebed and dance" with her thighs promising "the gold bush of lions."

Stanza 4: yet her sexual interest in inconstant, for just as the poet is ready to take her, she turns cold: "these are her contraries." Stalking his prey, the poet is "the beast" yet also a priest whose "grave foot" is the phallus in the grave of the womb, his five-fingered hand "five assassins" who wish to make the woman "die" sexually. Her desire mounts like a phoenix flying up the burning columns of her heavenly mansioned body (st. 1, l. 8); therefore, the poet calls to his "fire herd" of passions that have starved for love. But at this crucial moment, she turns from phoenix to ice, the phallic poet goes "limp-treed" and hungry in his silence, a scaler not of a burning mansion of love but a hill of hail whose steps are flinty and cold. Even when he reaches the top of her hill (mounts her) he is shut out by a "ring of summer" and "locked noons" from discovering in sexual climax a way to rejuvenate nature herself (summers, noons).

Stanza 5: enraged at the woman, the poet walks the beach by the "dead town" of sleeping Laugharne or a cemetery. Like Samson he wields an ass's jawbone as he walks over the "warring sands" that seem to have fallen out of love as a result of the "warring absence" of the lovers. He beats the air and destroys both east and west in his rage; then, he

hangs the shell of her heart with the blood veins torn from her hanging head and watches her eyelids close. At that moment, when he has murdered love itself, "destruction" rears its head in love's place and the poet identifies himself with destruction in nature: "like an approaching wave I sprawl to ruin."

Stanzas 6-7: according to Thomas's paraphrase, these stanzas describe the aftermath of the poet's destruction of love in which he is buried in an underwater pyramid (st. 6) and listens to a dialogue of mummies (st. 7) who reveal to him the regenerative powers of love. The poet is saved by an agent of love, "love's anatomist," who descends to the underwater pyramid and "with sun-gloved hand / . . . picks the live heart on a diamond," thus saving from death the poet's ability to love. The oblique dialogue of the mummies deals, of course, with intercourse, that of the poet's mother and father, who seem to be performing an act with primeval origins -- "mud," "lizard" -- linking the human sex act to creative processes in nature. The final comment of the mummies (st. 7, ll. 7-8) seems to say that re-entry into the womb by man is a form of resurrection for the dead.

Thus enlightened (though we readers may not be), the poet, in stanza 8, returns from the dead to apprehend nature as unbroken vision. In the grave his head had been "scraped of every legend" so that he lost the power to transform the personal into the mythic; reborn to love, his "once-blind eyes" (poet = blind Samson unable to pull down the "water-pillared shade") now breathe "a wind of visions." He achieves sexual union with Caitlin -- the act that makes apprehension of unfallen nature possible -- so that clitoral response ("cauldron's root") to his now fruitful hand is immense ("fumed like a tree"), and she accommodates his "burning bird." All the poet's nightmares and sexual fears ("the

crumpled packs" -- of cigarettes smokes in anger?) fled before his regenerated vision of love ("this ghost in bloom") and the sexual "pardon" from the once high and mighty woman (= "cloud of pride") leads, in the poem's best line, to the poet's consummate, awe-struck vision of his unity, through sexual mysticism, with external nature: "The terrible world my brother bares his skin." Thomas's own gloss on this key stanza includes the observation that "the resurrected hero sees the world with penetrating, altered eyes" (SL 186), and the stanza's final, moving line recalls Wordsworth's similar feelings of almost fearful awe before certain landscapes.

Stanza 9: now, through the woman, a brother to the world, the poet sees in her (woman = a cloud) cloud-breasts "quiet countries" and in her thighs "delivered seas"; from this cloud no lightning comes and a wind blows quietly that once raised the trees up like the poet's hair in their love arguments that have inner and outer consequences as these comparisons show. Oddly associating sexual contact with the woman with "soft snow," Thomas recalls when that snow, shed like warm blood, turned to ice. Finally, he knows that though he sucks her cloudy breasts today ("my love pulls the pale, nippled air"), the woman is thinking of whether she will want him sexually or not tomorrow (a thought that suckles her like a child); still, the "warring absence" of stanza 1 ends, for now, in the "forgiving presence" of the afterglow of sexual love. Less successfully realized than its companion poems on the effects on human love, as a sacrament, on external nature, this poem deals seriously with the same theme and ends with two strongly written stanzas. The "worlds uncoupling" of the draft of "Into Her Lying Down Head" are matched here by the uniting worlds of poet and "the terrible world my brother."

Before turning to three poems on fatherhood that are ancillary to the

marriage group -- "A Saint about the Fall," "If My Head Hurt A Hair's Foot," and "This Side of the Truth (for Llewelyn)," a poem that straddled my first two categories of poems on poetry and poems on marriage, may be briefly examined. One of Thomas's slighter poems, "Because the Pleasure-Bird Whistles" (P 144-45) is significant mainly in its anticipation of later developments in Thomas's poetry. Kidder sees in the poem's final line an anticipation of the sacramentalizing of love and landscape in the later poems while Moynihan specifically singles out the brief glimpses here of the seaside landscape of Laugharne as anticipating Thomas's later "romanticism" in the landscape poems.[31] Originally entitled "January 1939," the poem's end of the year survey of the poet's life and poetic productivity probably reflects the poet's fatherhood (Llewelyn, his first child, was born in January 1939). Images of snow, drugs, sodomy, and eating dominate this early example of Thomas's turning to memory for significant subjects (expressed here as an intention only).

Lines 1-4 are the poet's self-conscious summoning up of his circus animals -- bird and house -- to say that just because canaries are blinded to sing better the horse (poet) will not sing better for remaining blind to his own past year of dissolute living. Lines 5-12: outer landscape and time span correspond to inner, as the year's "tongue" and "lick" match the poet's "wild tongue" and "wood of hair," outer "sniffed and poured snow" corresponding to the poet's inner state of snowy "drug-white shower of nerves and food," and again, outer snow ("a wind that plucked a goose") like white feathers matching images of sodomy and pederasty that follow in Thomas's remembrance of three days of chemical and sexual dissipation in London. Linking personal experience to fable, the poet recalls the story of Sodom and Lot's wife (ll. 13-19), com-

paring London to Sodom (the "bum city" with "mauled pictures of boys"), possibly a sexually cold Caitlin to Lot's wife, and his intoxicated memories of London's "muddle of towers and galleries" to fallen Troy, "toppling and burning." Determined to use fable to illuminate his own past just as he used metaphors (ll. 1-4) at the beginning of the poem, the poet overcomes his tongue's disinclination to turn around to "look at the red, wagged root"; that is, he is determined to write poetry that makes personal experience mythopoeic, that uses metaphors to link inner and outer (cf. ll. 5-10), and to write poems that are inner journeys to the source (the red, wagged root) of his poetic powers. More generally, he appropriates the myth of Lot's wife to "furnish . . . a fable" for the present poem which is a meal expressing its emotive origins ("the supper and knives of a mood"). Not remaining true to the Christian interpretation of the story of Lot's wife and its moral lesson, Thomas reinterprets the myth to conform to personal experience and need (ll. 22-24). In Thomas's reading, Lot's wife should have looked back just as he is looking back on his binge in London, for if our past is forgotten ("if the dead starve") they will, in dyspeptic fashion, upend us (l. 23) in our present life (an act of sodomy that violates what Thomas tells us in the marriage poems of love's crucial importance) and will upend the world as well ("the antipodes," toppling Troy-London).

Thus, the past recaptured is like the poet's writing/supper-table over which he says "this present grace" which is the poem-as-prayer as well as the supper itself (l. 25). The significance of the fact that only in the lines dealing with Thomas's January walk in the snows in Laugharne do we get the Romantic device of outer description paralleling inner experience is reinforced by a slight, humorous poem written about the same time about the same London binge. That poem, "The Countryman's

Return" (P 154-57) is in the old tradition of the rustication poem such as those written by Wyatt from Kent. Rejecting degenerate London whose beer bloated the poet out into his "cavernous, featherbed self," Thomas calls himself not a city man but "a singing Walt /Whitman/" whose verse catalogues are not to be stripped of city particulars for the "green field" and "rusticating minutes" of country life. Although written with much irony, this poem, along with "Because the Pleasure-Bird Whistles," rightly locates the source and subject of Thomas's poetry, especially the landscape poetry to come, in nature and in Wales, not in an urban cityscape which many modern poets, unlike the Wordsworth of Prelude, Book VII, saw as the inevitably central location of modernist poetry.

Like the marriage poems, three related poems on fatherhood continue the objectifying or externalizing trend of the later poetry. A priest-like celebrator of sacramental love or mourner of its loss, Thomas as father in "A Saint about to Fall" (P 141-42) applies his old cosmology of the notebook poems on foetal consciousness and the "fall" into existence to his own son, Llewelyn, born in January, 1939. Originally entitled "In September" (1939), because, Thomas says, "it was a terrible war month" (LVW 45), the poem later had its title changed by Thomas on Watkins' advice to "Poem in the Ninth Month" and then finally to its present title. As in the earlier poems on birth, here too the Christian understanding of Eden, fall, and redemption is displaced into psychological, and physical, terms. Edenic consciousness and even heaven itself are associated with the foetus' life in the womb, the only real place of unity of being. The subsequent fall into existence is not the result of any moral transgression but is simply a necessary phase of experience that may foretell a return to unity. Restoration, not worked out in the poem which

is devoted mainly to birth, is hinted at in the association of the child with Christ and the implication that everyman is Christ and must endure incarnation in order to work out his own salvation. That the poet is able to move beyond his purely subjective perception of his own "remembered" prenatal life as in "Before I Knocked" to an objective description of the same process at work in his son is the significant fact about this poem. Furthermore, as the almost inevitable product of marriage, the child provides a way for the adult to re-experience, by way of the poem, the child's passage from the state of Eden into the world. Several critics note the similarity between this poem and Section V of Wordsworth's Intimations Ode: both infants enter the world trailing clouds of glory, though Thomas's child finds not a world of natural beauty as much as a world on the brink of world war.

Stanza 1: a simultaneous description of the foetus' journey out of the womb into the world and the fall of a saintly child from "heaven" to "earth," the opening stanza associates heaven and womb, the child and everyman's own Christhood and necessary fall into the divided world of experience. Created by sacramental human love, the child to be is a "saint" who is "about to fall" from the womb, which, as a place associated with psychic wholeness, is heaven. Falling from the womb like a bomb, the child blows up the "stained flats of heaven," stain-glassed or lower-class section of heaven through which the child falls last as he descends toward existence. The womb-heaven, in an act of religious devotion, kisses the hem of his "shawl" or birth caul as he enters the birth passage ("the last street"), where, like Odysseus (WDT 83), he begins an epic water journey lured on by the sirens' "song by rocks" which is also the mother's sexual moaning as a result of the father's entrance into the womb. The womb, "his father's house in the sands," is Penelope's "woven

wall" now "unwinding" as the birth moment nears. No longer a sailor in a harmonious sea of ship and bells, the foetus, hands over face, waits for the "blood-counting clock" of the nine months in the womb to strike birth. The womb is a volcano and a fireball that contains angels ("angelic etna," "whirring featherlands") that the foetus must abandon in his fall. He is also the shepherd of the landscape of the womb, having "hymned his shrivelling flock" that diminishes as he nears birth. The pastoral existence in the womb includes the growing of grain ("the last rick's tip") and vine ("spilled wine-wells") that, until recently upturned by his impending absence, were the body and the blood of sacramental human love celebrated by the child in the womb. Now "heaven hungry" as the birth moment nears, the child, about to be born as a mixture of spirit and flesh ("flames and shells") becomes his own Christ: "Cut Christbread vinegar and all" with an awful pun (vinegar and oil).

Stanza 2: the child is born into the world and his father describes the nature of the fall and the present threat of war. The first line, "Glory cracked like a flea," Thomas described to Watkins as an intentionally "grotesque contrast" with the mythopoeic description in stanza 1 of the child-as-Christ in womb-heaven. Glory turns to ruin, the majestic to the lowly, in a single simile that is, to me, daringly effective, in spite of the general critical view. As he did in the notebook gestation poems, here too Thomas "backs up" from childhood to foetus-hood the time when man and nature are most happily intertwined. In a marvelously suggestive line, Thomas describes the "sun-leaved holy candlewoods" that, at birth, become "one singeing tree / With a stub of black buds." The first line may, externally, describe a sacramental landscape whose trees are the candles of devotees, holy, books of the sun; likewise, internally, the line describes unity of being in the womb

whose vulvic sides are turned apart by the son ("sun-leaved") or whose woods have sons for leaves, the womb being holy (hole-y) and a woody place where father's candle has burned brightly. A good example of the polysemous metaphor so common in Thomas, the line links inner and outer events, and, with the two lines that follow, documents the Romantic "fall" from a holistic perception of nature to a sense of estrangement. Next, after a brief review of the child's phylogenic development ("fish-gilled boats bringing blood") and the sucking capsizing of the child-boat at birth when "heaven fell with his fall," the poet turns horatory and addressed the child. Drawing parallels between world-life and womb-life, the poet tells the child that he will now live in a muddy house nestled in the "crotch" of the seashore in Laugharne. Home from his birth in a London hospital ("the carbolic city") where Caitlin suffered in a "bed of sores," the saint-child will have to adjust to an "odd room in a split house" and become aware that, in the world, the external divisiveness of war and the internal (skull = earth) divisiveness of self-consciousness must be endured: "The skull of the earth is barbed with a war of burning brains and hair." Still, the child plays a role in evoking in the poet ("O wake in me") the remnants of a vision of unfallen nature as a mansion whose bottom parts the poet may still apprehend: "The scudding base of the familiar sky, / The lofty roots of the clouds."

Stanza 3: the poet tells the child to heroically endure the fall, to live out his own Christhood, to affirm rather than to deny, and to regain the unity of being of life in the womb by re-entering it, as a man, in the act of sacramental love. Let the child accost the town where he lives, let him hear the worst and defy the madness of the asylum of the world and all those who would kill him as Herod sought to kill

Christ. Having fallen from the womb, the child is no longer capable of unimpeded vision or response to nature: "the eyes are already murdered, / The stocked heart is forced." His "noble fall" into the ancient mud of generation leaves him no choice but to act out his Christ-like agony on the cross with its "sponge" of vinegar and iron spear entering the side like a stranger. Yet at the magic birth moment ("the witch-like midwife second") the child should "Cry joy," a phrase which Thomas called the poem's "two most important words" (LVW 45). He should cry joy because his very birth will mean that, as the sun marks his growth into manhood, the "girl-circled island" of the womb he will re-enter as a "thundering bull-ring" where his phallic bull will return him to the womb-heaven from whence he first came. Thomas's own emphasis in his letter to Watkins on the words "Cry joy" recalls M. H. Abrams' argument that what distinguishes English Romantics from Blake to Byron from many of their Modernist successors is the earlier Romantics' emphasis on joy and love and relationship, values that obviously dominate Thomas's own poems of marriage, fatherhood, and later, sacramental landscapes.[32]

The second of three poems on fatherhood is "If My Head Hurt A Hair's Foot" (P 145-46). Thomas singled this poem out as a good example of his method of structuring a poem, not by narrative or argument, but by "a series of conflicting images which move through pity and violence to an unreconciled acceptance of suffering: the mother's and the child's" (QEOM 133). A dialogue between an unborn child (st. 1-3) and its mother (st. 4-6), this poem figured in a famous debate over Thomas's obscurity between Robert Graves, who offered a pound for any clear explication, and M. J. C. Hodgart, who offered the standard paraphrase, but did not get the pound.[33] Oddly, Graves picked one of Thomas's clearest "middle" period poems to exemplify a real tendency, but elsewhere, toward im-

penetrability. For one main reason -- Thomas's ability to create two objectively presented characters separate from his own subjective stance -- this poem merits attention here. In addition, of course, it is another poem centering on the figure of the child, again, unborn, who falls into self-consciousness and suffering upon leaving the heaven-womb. A companion poem to "A Saint about to Fall," this poem is ultimately slighter.

Stanzas 1-3: spoken by the unborn child to his mother, these lines attribute pre-natal consciousness to the foetus, as well as a delicacy of tact and excellent manners. In metaphors that convey with clinical accuracy the problems of birth (st. 1), gestation and birth as a competitive sport (st. 2), and a foreknowledge of his conception and birth as a burden to both his parents, the child makes a long apology for his intrusion. If my head-first birth should cause pain to your pubic hair, let my young-as-downy-birds bone be pushed back up into the womb. Should my first round lung of breath interfere with the activity of father's phallic "sport" let the ball of breath be punctured. Rather than irritate your love into sickness in the theater of your bed where love's blows fall, let the umbilical cord strangle me like the worm of death. Before I would rush out the birth channel to fight the air, a hammering ghost, see light like striking a match in darkness, and make the bedroom where mother cries out a place of blood, I would, as if playing one of several games appropriate to one now gestating in your "ring of a cockfight" womb, foray forever in the "snared woods" of your womb like a nighttime poacher ("with a glove on a lamp"), dance on the spouting sperm of father and "duck time" for the fall into time is post-natal (thus, womb is heaven). Looking like a monkey with a crumpled-up face, I may be born to you with pain; if so, send me back

into the "making house" of the womb lest when you and father have sex ("sew the deep door") I "unravel" that sewing. I know that "the bed is a cross place" for lovers cross sexually, genetically, get cross, and in creating a child undergo and cause the child to undergo crucifixion-birth. This being so, if my pain to you is too great, arc me back like a turned-around steeplechaser through "nine thinning months" of reversed pregnancy until I thin out to nothingness.

Stanzas 4-6: replying, the mother says that neither a return to unbeing nor a rush to death is possible now. Not wishing to change places with Mary whose "dazzling bed" bore Christ nor wishing a life of bejeweled laziness and painless sleep, the mother tells the child that she accepts the fact of his impending birth and its pain. In two striking lines, the mother calls on the child to come as the womb's breaking birthwater becomes Noah's flood: "Thrust, my daughter or son, to escape, there is none, none, none / Now when all ponderous heaven's host of water breaks." Still, knowing at the moment when the womb becomes hollow again ("hushed of gestures . . . my joy like a cave") that the child becomes "unfree" outside womb-heaven, a "lost love bounced from a good home," and a spirit incarnate in a "grain" that speeds toward the grave, the mother tells the child he must "couch and cry" in life's house. Reminding him that he cannot escape the grain of the body that will one day die, she invites him to rest on her breast of seas and to give up hope of escaping existence by a return to the "fat streets" of the womb or advancing too soon to the "thin ways" of the skeleton, she characterizes his birth as the archetype of genesis, man's surest weapon against death: "And the endless beginning of prodigies suffers open." Again, each child is a Christ victorious over death, and love, between mother and child in

this case, justifies suffering and restores for a time the "endless beginning" of the unfallen world.

A final poem in this fatherhood group is "This Side of the Truth" (for Llewelyn) (P 192-93). Addressed now to the child as a young boy, this poem holds clues to Thomas's later development in "Fern Hill" of a recognition of the significance of the child. "This Side of the Truth" anticipates "Fern Hill" most certainly in its juxtaposition of the "two consciousnesses" -- that of the child and that of the man -- with their differing views of nature. Something of a philosophical poem and a poem (for Thomas) of fairly direct statement, "This Side of the Truth" has been interpreted pessimistically as Thomas's view that the moral categories of good and evil, as well as a variety of other opposites, are false divisions apprehended only by the self-conscious adult. Concomitantly, however, the same critics who offer this interpretation see also in the adult's side of the argument a view of nature as ultimately amoral. E. Glyn Lewis, for instance, sees an unresolved conflict in the poem between Christian values (good/evil) and an occult sense of the unitary nature of experience. Hoxie Fairchild draws parallels with Blake's hatred of Urizenic divisions of good and evil arrived at by a reductive rationality, while Stanford sees "pantheism" where others see a mechanistic determinism.[34]

Stanza 1: Thomas the father speaking to Llewelyn the son (six years old) distinguishes the child from the adult perception of external nature. Each perspective seems equally valid, for each is a "side" of the truth (l. 1), although adult estrangement from nature, the longer and more tragic experience, is emphasized. As a child of nature, the son "may not see" nature in its fallen form; rather, he is a monarch with the eyes of imagination whose country is visionary nature

-- "King of your blue eyes / In the blinding country of youth" (blinding = blind from the light of vision yet also blind to the fall to come). As an adult, his imaginative communion with nature will yield to a vision of purposelessness and a division of mental faculties. The skies will then be "unminding," that is, devolving from an entity informed by intelligence, unmothering, and not corresponding to the perceiving human mind. Unitary, spontaneous experience of nature will be replaced by meaningless "innocence and guilt" and by "heart or head" whose "gestures" of relationship toward nature, emotional or rational (but not a single unitary response), will lead the grown up child only into the "winding dark" of estrangement and death.

Stanza 2 and stanza 3 (ll. 1-4): dying on the sea of life, you will find, my son, as a grown man, no longer emotionally responding to nature as when you were "king of your heart in the blind days" that "good and bad" as two ways of living your life are meaningless terms, exhaling themselves from our bodies like air or wailing as they pass through all men's souls into death and dark, death and dark being both "innocent" and "guilty," "good" and "bad," and thus really neither of the two pairs. All opposites, all moral categories rationally distinguished collapse into "the last element" which may be death or possibly being itself or nature as perceived by the adult. Three similes that humanize cosmic bodies that collapse into the "last element" probably mean that the child's anthropomorphic vision of nature as allied to man and the adult poet's attempt to rekindle that vision by the exercise of poetic imagination cannot forever sustain their vision against the void:

> Good and bad . . .
> In the last element
> Fly like the stars' blood
>
> Like the sun's tears,
> Like the moon's seed

all of which images unite poetic language and nature: "the flying rant of the sky."

Becoming more and more like a dejection ode, the poem, in stanza 3 (ll. 5-12) envisions the final collapse of nature as perceived by the child's and the poet's imagination. As Walford Davies acutely notes, it is not the child ("king of your six years") but the dejected adult poet who describes as a "wicked wish" the child's experience of nature in its visionary form. Davies glosses: "the 'wish' is the basic impulse towards creativity; only man's self-consciousness can make it appear 'wicked'" (SP 126). Nevertheless, the poet, at least in this poem, despairs of the child's or his own ability to sustain a vision of beneficent nature; thus, nature collapses "down the beginning" of plants, animals, birds, "water and light, the earth and sky." Yet as the child grows up into the adult consciousness of his father, his imaginative "deeds and words" that, in the nature of things, must become divided into "each truth, each lie," may end up redeeming him because the child must, as his father, see that all opposites "die in unjudging love." Linking the figure of the child, nature, the poem on poetics, marriage, and the fatherhood poems, this final line expounds Thomas's insistence in so many of the later poems on the final efficacy of love as a link between self and world, the resolver of divisions and opposites. In his study of the Romantic figure of the child, Tony Tanner quotes a passage from The Prelude that shows striking parallelism to Thomas's poem's final line, "die in unjudging love." Wordsworth writes of his childhood:

> . . . could I then take part
> In ought but admiration, or be pleased
> With anything but humbleness and love;
> I felt, and nothing else; I did not judge,
> I never thought of judging, with the gift
> Of all this glory fill'd and satisfied.

Tanner comments: "Admiration (wondering at) rather than judging: that is one of the crucial romantic preferences . . . childhood then becomes a visionary state to which man should attempt to return."[35] Although weighted more heavily toward pessimism in this regard, Thomas's poem does rise to a similar affirmation in its final line, "unjudging love" being held out not only to the child but to himself as the poet's final power for establishing a spiritual relationship with nature.

Before proceeding to the "war poems" group, two poems, one on marriage and one on a child, that do not reflect Thomas's own marriage or fatherhood but which deal with the same issues as poems in the marriage and fatherhood group should be briefly examined. The first of these, "On the Marriage of a Virgin" (P 170), a substantial revision of Poem 16 in the February Notebook has as its theme the idea that human love completes and complements a woman's experience of divine love inherent in nature.

Stanza 1: waking up in her bed in the morning, a new bride, yesterday a virgin, remembers yesterday's miraculous "multitude of loves" bestowed on her by her natural lover the sun ("the morning's light") whose action recalls Zeus' lovemaking with mortals and the descent of the Holy Ghost to the Virgin Mary. Memories of past erotic moments of union with her lover the sun (" his golden yesterday") lie on the "iris" of her eyes (Iris = virgin mother of Eros). Now, as the morning rays of today's sun strike her thighs, they "leapt up the sky" again as if she gave birth to a child of the sun who rose up to become one with his father. The virgin birth is "miraculous virginity," a miracle like other miracles that go back at least as far as the "loaves and fishes" episode from Jesus' life. Like that miracle, the present

virgin's bearing of the sun's child, though only a "moment of a miracle," is the portal through which she enters into a knowledge of nature as divinity ("unending lightning"), just as Christ's walking on the water at Galilee (each footprint on the water being a ship from a shipyard of tracks) inherently contained the power to release other miracles -- "a navy of doves" -- (doves = sacred to Venus and profane love; SP 120).

Stanza 2: no longer a virgin, the new wife will no longer be the sun's lover but a man's, human love ("that other sun") matching her love with nature as divinity and even exceeding it by invoking the body ("the unrivalled blood"). Not "married alone" as a virgin lover of the sun whose "avalanche" and "golden luggage" were his seed she consumed, she now finds that "a man sleeps where fire leapt down" thus completing her experience of love by linking the human, the natural, and the divine, the body and the spirit, in human lovemaking -- to Thomas, the ultimate sacrament.

"The Conversation of Prayer" (P 193-94), like "This Side of the Truth" and "Fern Hill," juxtaposes the "two consciousnesses" of the child and the adult. The action of the poem is simple: a man and a child climb the stairs to bed, the child selfishly praying that he will not have nightmares and the man unselfishly praying that "his dying love" will survive; in the end, the child does have nightmares while the man's love survives. The moral apparently is that love as a power that brings relationship between the self and the external "other" is the only true "prayer" there is, a power residing with divinity in nature but singly evoked by the particular sacrament of human love for another. Critics have unsuccessfully tried to make this poem conform to the Catholic doctrine of the "reversibility of grace"

(Fraser), or the Welsh bardic tradition (due to the poem's criss-cross internal/end rhyme scheme that parallels the crossing prayers of the man and the boy).[36] Walford Davies, following Emery (WDT 253), de-emphasizes the poem as a study of religious matters in favor of seeing it as a Romantic song of innocence and experience. The poem, he says, is "the dramatized meeting-point between innocence and experience . . . a young boy experiencing the tragic nightmare of the adult . . . /its theme/ the inevitability of suffering and disillusion (foretasted by the child in his unaccountable nightmare). I think the child is Thomas's real concern."[37] Really, Thomas seems equally concerned with both, but he is obviously asking the Wordsworthian question -- when the child's sensibility dies or comes to be seen by the adult as only a privileged, partial view, what recourse does the adult have? As in most of the poems on poetics, marriage, and fatherhood, love is the only answer.

In this poem, the man is "on the stairs" as if spirally ascending to some higher level of consciousness symbolized by "his dying love in her high room" whom to save he ascends while the ascending but selfish boy finds only nightmare (st. 4, ll. 2-5). That she is called "love" makes her that power as well as a person, as if the house where man and boy are in the psyche, their parallel journeys being the two phases of Romantic experience: (1) childhood leading to estrangement (the nightmare) and (2) estranged adulthood leading to a higher, synthesizing state incorporating both childhood and adulthood (= the "love" saved by prayer.) Living in the "green ground" of nature, the supplicants' prayers ascend to "answering skies" that are not symbols of a transcendental realm so much as of that final height (cf. the stairs) of consciousness, informed by love, in which child, man, and green

ground are one. Praying for "sleep in a safe land," the child unknowingly prays to be saved from the nightmare of adult self-consciousness ("the dark eyed wave through the eyes of sleep"; eyes = inescapable consciousness). Conversely, the adult, like Thomas the poet, seeks relationship to the "other" through the prayer of love and thus, going to his dying love's bedroom, he "shall find no dying." His love will be found "alive and warm / In the fire of his care . . . in the high room." The title, once called "The Conversation of Prayers," was changed to "The Conversation of Prayer" for the prayers of both child and man are really aspects of one "prayer" or entreaty that makes up Thomas's version of the Romantic myth whose phases are present in this psyche-house in the guise of child, nightmare/death, and love.

The War Poems: 1940-45. If the first "threat" to Thomas's early poetry's obsessive theme of the imaginative identification of poet and cosmos was his experience of marriage and fatherhood, the second and in many ways more powerful threat was his experience of the Blitz in wartime London. In the poems of marriage and fatherhood, as well as in certain other poems dealing with the "other" in between self and cosmos ("The Hunchback," "After the Funeral"), Thomas could use metaphors linking inner and outer, self and other, or else sacramental or mythopoeic language that translated the personal into the universal -- a wife into a sacramental portal to the apprehension of nature as divine or a child as a figure of unity of being or oneness with nature -- but doing so for German bombers whose firebombs gutted London and burned thousands to death was another matter altogether. The war was a "pressure of reality" that had to be balanced by a "pressure of imagination" but as tragic subject it had to be handled with the greatest delicacy yet also with unflinchingness before the human tragedy of the "others" who had died.

Of the handful of poems written on the war, Thomas wrote at least two extremely fine poems -- "A Refusal to Mourn" and "Ceremony after a Fire Raid" -- that, unlike almost all war poems, have completely survived their original occasions and contexts in World War II.

Following Watkins' seminal comment (AST xii-xiii, quoted above), Walford Davies summarizes the important relationship between the war and Thomas's poetry: (1) the war was a "profound moral shock" to Thomas who had never thought that anything really terrible could happen to him; (2) Thomas's war poems dealt strictly with that part of the war which he witnessed personally, the London bombings; (3) the early strivings to identify man and the cosmos were threatened now because with the war "a new area of experience became demandingly real"; and, most significantly, as Watkins notes, (4) Thomas's wartime residence in London that separated him from Wales made him realize the extreme importance of the Welsh landscape and his own childhood experiences there in the development of his poetry, that, as a result, after the war turned sharply toward elegiac reminiscences of childhood and the Welsh landscapes that affected him then and again after the war in his permanent move to the small Welsh seaside village of Laugharne.[38] In the war poems, then, the central question is essentially the same as in the marriage and the fatherhood poems: to what extent, if any, can the poet's imagination, in the act of constructing the poem, transform some aspect of the external world so that its ultimate significance is revealed as compatible with the poet's own desires?

Saving the two best poems for last, I want to examine first the four other war poems as studies in the right relation of the poet, whose only weapon is the creative one of imagination, to the outer destructiveness of war. One of the earliest war poems is "Deaths and Entrances"

(P 160-61) whose title became the title of Thomas's first post-war collection, Deaths and Entrances (1946). Written in 1940 during the Blitz and in anticipation of an impending German invasion ("I've finished my poem about invasion"; LVW 101), "Deaths and Entrances" has been generally condemned by critics as "magniloquent diffuseness . . . rhetoric out of focus" although praised as an early example of displacement of solipsism by "mature human awareness."[39] This divergence in theme and style, also a criticism levelled at the marriage poems, may indicate Thomas's struggle to align his self-conceived role as a Romantic poet with the experience of war.

Stanza 1: addressing an indefinite "you" who may be a fellow Londoner, RAF pilot, or even German pilot, the poet says that he shall remain silent amid the air raids though he would like to raise his poet's voice to reverse the outer destruction that threatens him and others. Emphasizing the close calls of falling bombs ("almost incendiary eve," "several near deaths"), the poet addresses his fellow Londoners, accurately identifying himself as a good but minor poet ("One at the great least of your best loved . . . of your immortal friends"). Though a minor poet, he is famous for his life and his popular poems ("always known") yet he fears that his possible death will rob his fellow sufferers of his imaginative power to counteract the bombings -- the "lions and fires of his flying breath." As British lion, his poems his fires to fight the fires of bombers, his breath his airplane that flies with the valiant RAF pilots, the poet calls himself one "who'd raise the organs of the counted dust / To shoot and sing your praise" as a celebrator and imaginative regenerator of life amid death. Organs, of course, are musical (thus poetic) and phallic. A poet who drew upon his most central powers ("One who called deepest

down" like Owen Glendower), Thomas, who can neither die nor escape the war ("sink or cease"), cannot fuse inner love and outer war in parallel fashion to "many married London" but must be silent and endure "estranging grief." The poet who wrote his poems for "the lovers" in "In My Craft" now feels helpless before the firestorms of bombed London.

Stanza 2: the poet tells his fellow Londoners that he will try to use his poetic powers to reverse the destructiveness and to replace it with regeneration and with vision. Almost burned up in an evening raid, the Londoners' nervous mouths clatter, their teeth like white piano keys that lock and unlock their fear-induced lockjaw that separates them from the poet who now feels he cannot remain lockjawed before all the violence. While RAF and/or German pilots are shot down and careen towards earth ("the murdered strangers weave"), the poet, unknown to them, ready to dive for shelter in the ocean of his own tears, recalls that he is that same poet who identifies himself with the cosmos -- "Your polestar neighbor, sun of another street" -- and who thus might be able to find a way to exercise power over the sky wars. The poet says that he will redeem and regenerate and reveal: in the sea of the dead, fallen bodies of male pilots he will bathe his blood; from the streaming tears of grieving Londoners ("your water thread") he will create a new world, the world of poetic imagination (He'll . . . / . . . wind his globe"); and the sound of bursting bombshells will be counteracted by the "throats of shells" of the poet whose throat becomes a battery of anti-aircraft guns whose shells are crying poems used to shoot down planes (!). Such crying poems, reversing the cries of the wounded, are visionary and open up the skies like Zeus revealing himself in a cloud: "light / Flashed first across his thunderclapping eyes."

Stanza 3: addressing a downed British airman, Thomas tells what he will do as poet to avenge the airman's death. During the fiery night of deaths and entrances -- not only deaths and births of humans but more generally the power of destruction itself versus the poet's powers of creation and revelation -- when friends and strangers who hear over the airwaves of the BBC of a British airman's fall to a "single grave" search him out, "one enemy" (i.e., the poet as enemy of the enemy, or, if the downed airman is German, simple "the enemy") -- the poet -- who knows "your heart is luminous" as it burns will exercise his power over nature to appropriate her thunderbolts, to mount up the "darkened keys" of the death song of the downed pilot to luminously regenerate the dead RAF pilots ("sear just riders back") until the poet, "that one loved least" (cf. st. 1, l. 3), remains "the last Samson of your zodiac" ready to pull down the heavens themselves to defeat the Philistine-Germans, a truly Promethean effort!

Toward the end of the war (November, 1944), Thomas wrote another poem investigating the usefulness of the poet's power against destructiveness in the external world -- "Holy Spring" (P 186). Thomas's only comment on this poem -- "here is a poem of mine which I started a long time ago but finished very recently, after a lot of work (LVW 123) -- may indicate that the germ of this poem originated, like the earlier "Deaths and Entrances," in the Blitz of 1940. Although the critics are agreed with Walford Davies' comment that Thomas is asking how his poetry can remain "affirmative and celebratory" (SP 123) amid the destruction of war, they tend to diverge thereafter into those who see the central source of Thomas's faith in creative renewal in divine nature (Emery, WDT 182) or in the poet's divine faculty of imagination (Tindall, RG 265-66). Stanza 2 seems explicitly to support Tindall on this one, and my reading

generally follows his.

Stanza 1: rising out the bed where I have just made love, the only balm for a body doomed to death, I found the war that I detest but whose external benightedness better defines the nature of my own inner poetic light; finding no aid to self-knowledge in religious orthodoxy or in human wisdom, I am made aware that, as a poet, I stand alone in my creative endeavors that parallel yet exceed those of the sun. Uniting the sacramental love of the marriage poems and the emphasis on released love in the poems on poetry, this stanza adds the poet's concerns over war to make this poem a candidate for any one of my three categories. Inner and outer processes are woven together as lovemaking (a "bed of love" in the "immortal hospital" of the womb) becomes a healing process to counteract the destructiveness of the war (as well as destructiveness in general -- "ruin and his causes") that makes the "wounds and houses" of the lovers' bodies the wounds and houses of those affected by war. Love being only a consolation or partial cure for war, the poet gets out of his bed of love to confront civilly (as a civilian, "to greet") the great external threat: "I climb to greet the war in which I have no heart but only / That one dark I owe my light." Attempting to reconcile ("greet") warring outer and peace-loving inner worlds, the poet, whose poems flow expressivistically from his heart, finds in that outer dark "no heart" of his own; yet in that "one dark" he finds a debt to the "light" of his poetic powers: that is, the "dark" is that which imagination must work upon, the opposite of light that must be united with light in the resolution of opposites. Looking for some traditional authority to explain the right relation of inner light to outer dark, the poet turns to religion and rational humanism -- "Call for confessor and wise mirror" -- yet he knows "there

is none / To glow after the god stoning night." Religion and reason are dead. Only "my light" as poet is left "to glow," a fact that stuns me: "And I am struck as lonely as a holy maker by the sun." As a Romantic poet, Thomas creates poems in solitude ("lonely"), a solitude learned from the solitary sun whose creative energies regenerate the divine and natural world including the poet ("holy maker") whose poems partake of that same creative power.

Stanza 2: admitting that the divinely regenerative powers of nature are efficacious, the poet refuses to praise them so long as war's destructiveness continues; rather, the poet praises the very destructiveness that threatens him, for, as the "opposite" to his own creative powers, that destructiveness is the occasion of the poet's engagement of these powers, even though this balancing of opposites may collapse if the poet should die in war. Spring is divine and annunciatory -- "all / Gabriel and radiant shrubbery" -- the "morning grows joyful" after a night of pyre-producing firebombing and all Londoners' universal "tear" turns cold on the Judaic "weeping wall" of the bombshelters. In spite of nature's renewal, the poet offers "No / Praise"; rather, in two lines that are polysemous metaphors for natural renewal, human lovemaking, and the poet's creation of poems (RG 267) -- "My arising prodigal / Sun the father his quiver full of the infants of pure fire" -- the poet praises destruction: "blessed be hail and upheaval." He praises the opposite of three forms of creative renewal -- nature, love, and poetry -- especially because of the third of these forms -- poetry. With God and his confessor, wise man and their counsels, gone, the "light" that opposes the outer dark can come in certainty, not from conciliatory lovemaking or from powerful but undirected natural regeneration, but from the creative processes of poetry: "it is sure alone to stand and sing /

Alone in the husk of man's home" (husk = womb, London, nature). The holy spring itself, like the houses of womb and London, is a "toppling house" because nature is maternal ("the mother") and thus toppled by the phallic father sun and also because nature, though it may compensate for war, cannot directly oppose it as can the poet's marshalled imaginative powers, "if only for a last time," until the poet dies. If, as Blake said, without opposites is no progression, then Thomas here may fear that the creative side of the creative/destructive opposition is in danger of collapsing: though human lovemaking and nature's renewing powers are allies, the poet's creative powers stand at the center of the battlefront on the side of the forces of creation. Withholding or bestowing his praise and blessing, Thomas continues the movement begun in poems like "After the Funeral" and "Unluckily for a Death" from seeking a complete fusion of self and world to establishing himself, as poet, as celebrator or priest who stands Janus-like on the border of various opposites -- self/world, child/adult, divine/natural -- in order to use imagination and its images that function as metaphors to hold the opposites together as one. Although a minor poem, "Holy Spring" is important for its revelation of a large part of Thomas's poetic intention that I have just outlined.

Another war poem that sheds light on Thomas's views on the relationship of poetry and war is the controversial poem "There was a Saviour" (P 152-54). On the surface only obliquely related to the war, this poem's theme arises from Thomas's experience of hiding in air raid shelters during the war, the spirit of deeply felt wartime sympathy and comradeship with "strangers," and the poet's reflections on the failure of Christianity to prevent the war. As a Romantic, Thomas argues that religious superstructures like Christianity are inadequate to contain

personal experience; rather, the only meaningful relationships are single meetings of two separate selves united only by a "love" that is friendly, sexual, and/or spiritual. Written in 8-line stanzas that imitate the stanzaic form of Milton's "Ode: On Christ's Nativity" (Thomas called his poem "my austere poem in Milton measure"; LVW 82), but with assonantal rhymes and with the indentations of the lines reversed to fit Thomas's reversal of Milton's theme, "There was a Saviour" establishes the importance of Thomas's later view of the poet as a releaser of the power of love into the world, the only power that links self and others or self and the world in a world stripped of orthodoxy and its authority.

Stanza 1: speaking of the orthodox Christ of the churches, Thomas finds that this Christ offered only imprisoning illusions about reality. Both god and man, he was rare (radium) and common (water), yet "crueller than truth" in his offered fantasies of an afterlife. His religion separated children from nature (a Romantic evil) -- "Children kept from the sun / Assembled at his tongue" -- where they heard the gospel like a record playing over and over again on a grammophone. Their wishes and his "keyless smiles" kept them prisoners of illusion.

Stanza 2: speaking from "a lost wilderness" (i.e., orthodoxy as a wilderness or from orthodoxy as a place where the wilderness of childhood's relation to nature is lost), the unitary "voice of children" confesses that the children hid in Christ's individuality-"murdering breath", ignoring personal responsibility for man's cruelty to himself and nature, hiding in Christ's "safe unrest" or established religious revolution while their smug silence ignored the "tremendous shout" of human and animal suffering.

Stanza 3: self-indulgently enjoying the emotional release from

contemplating, within the allowed rituals of the church, Christ's sacrifice and shedding tears in desirous anticipation of an afterlife, we became unable to really sympathize with "mere" human suffering on earth. In the poem's best line, Thomas says that now, however, amid the air raids of London, stripped to essentials, all of us realize that human experience is a matter of the individual relations of single, separate selves: "now in the dark there is only yourself and myself."

Stanzas 4-5: now, the poet says, here in the blackout it is not the Christ-man but the man-man relation that is essential: "Two proud, blacked brothers cry, / Winter-locked side by side." Unable to cry before except when contemplating Christ's sacrifice or our own longing for heaven, now we learn through wartime comradeship how to cry for "the little known fables" not of Christ's death or Adam's fall but everyman's loss of life or home in the war. Let the dust of the war dead become one with each of us, be "our own true strangers' dust" that enters each of our formerly "unentered house" of the separate self. Thus each of the war dead lives, in a sense, "exiled in us," for that which unites man to man is not Christ or orthodoxy but that great power which the poet fosters in his poems: "the soft / Unclenched, armless, silk and rough love that breaks all rocks." Love, in other words, in all its unselfish forms brings relationship between man and man, destroying the rock of St. Peter, of Christ's tomb, or most probably any obstruction to relationship between "yourself" and "myself." Pleading for a Blakean view of each man's Christhood or a Shelleyan view of love's revolutionary, healing powers, Thomas here presents a case for what Moynihan rightly calls an "impassioned humanism" and what Tindall calls a Blakean recognition that the orthodox Christ is really an imprisoning Lucifer (RG 268). The experience of war, in effect, crystal-

lized a view, expressed here, whose affirmative counterview of every-man's Christhood was the subject of the Altarwise sonnets and other pre-war poems.

Of the minor war poems, the last remaining for consideration is the sonnet "Among Those Killed in the Dawn Raid was a Man Aged a Hundred" (P 172-73). Polemically divided over this poem, critics see Thomas's description of the bizarrely gratuitous death of a centurian by a firebomb as "pure trifling" (Olson), an event from a "toy war" (Holbrook), a failure to sustain the awesome tone of the opening line (Fuller); or, on the other hand, a refusal to let the indignities of newspaper reportage, Christian burial, and war propaganda obscure the "natural triumph" of the man's death (W. Davies, SP 121), or finally a successful "pagan apotheosis" of the old man whose long existence has made him "an essential part of the natural order" (Korg).[40] In any case, the poem complements "There was a Saviour" in rejecting Christian resurrection for naturalistic resurrection, the timeless union of the old man and the natural world that the intrusive human destructiveness of war cannot prevent.

Lines 1-5: walking outside in the dawn, the hundred year old man is struck by a bomb and dies. Line 1 implies that nature is more powerful than human war for "the morning" is "waking over" the war, holding a wake over or ascending above the war (RG 236). Significantly, we are told not that he "was killed" but that "he died," the act of death thus with dignity remaining a part of the natural cycle rather than being emphasized as an aberrant human act. Though it is a nice point, Emery seems sure that the old man dies from natural causes just prior to the bomb's falling, making this absurd irony of war even stranger (WDT 174). The old man fell down dead "where he loved" and was immediately buried

in the "funeral grains of the slaughtered floor" (l. 6) on the street where he lived. That is, local, personal life fostered by love is the old man's true reality: the destruction of his neighborhood street itself the significant funeral rite, not the inevitable Christian funeral provided by the state and its ambulances.

Lines 6-9: as the self is the center of things, Thomas can say that at his death the old man "stopped a sun" like Joshua, for when the old man died the sun stopped for him (sun also = bomb). Hit and illuminated by the bomb, the old man has the power, through his ancient body (and the poet's metaphors) to translate the destructive power of the bomb into the force that through the green fuse drives the flower: "the craters of his eyes grew springshoots and fire." Released from the unlocked cage of the body (ll. 3, 8-9, 11), the dead man is translated into a power of nature. The poet's power to create metaphors gives him a central, priest-like function in this pantheistic resurrection. Calling off the impending rite of Christian burial -- the "common cart" of the dead in a Christian country who are taken by the "heavenly ambulance" (the Red Cross?) "drawn by a wound" (Christ) -- the poet imagines the war-toppling morning and the god of the sun as rejuvenated by the old man's death: "The morning is flying on the wings of his age / And a hundred storks perch on the sun's right hand."

A baby-bringing stork for each of the old man's years, the nature worshipper, the saved, sit on the right hand of their sun god who may also be the world tree, his rays his branches where the storks perch. Like Wordsworth's Lucy, or like a further chapter in the history of the old leech-gatherer, this old man is a humble, commonplace figure who is ennobled by his relationship to nature, not to society or the merely human significance of war. Thus, "he died," not "was killed" by

a bomb, for, as in Hardy's "In the Time of the Breaking of Nations," enduring natural and human cycles outlast wars. That the poet as a celebrator, even in his powerfully extravagant metaphors, partakes in the pantheistic resurrection, prepares us for his triumphant assumption of that same role in two of Thomas's best poems, the final two war poems, "A Refusal to Mourn" and "Ceremony after a Fire Raid."

"A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" (P 191-92) explains its occasion in its title. Written in four stanzas rhyming abcabc, with lines 2 and 4 of each stanza short lines of five syllables and the other lines nine, ten, or eleven syllables, and, in addition, the first thirteen lines of the poem forming a single, syntactically grandiloquent sentence, the poem achieves an oracular, stately tone that is appropriate to its grave, weird, and awesome subject: an elegy without mourning for a young girl killed in an air raid in wartime London. Since numerous critics have provided thorough readings of this poem and since the poem's language is almost entirely lucid, my analysis here simply focuses on the Romantic elements in the poem, all of which have been noted in other contexts by previous critics. Emergent in the other war poems such as "Deaths and Entrances," "Dawn Raid," "Holy Spring," and as the direct subject of "There was a Saviour," is the figure of the poet, fully realized here and in "Ceremony," as priestly intermediary between an external landscape and some objectified "other": an RAF airman, an old man, children schooled in orthodox Christianity, or here, a single female child, the victim of a firebomb. The ceremony, sacramentalism, ritual that probably originated in Thomas's early poems that identified self and Christ were extended by him in the marriage poems such as "Unluckily for a Death" to "others" (Caitlin, mainly) who existed in that vast range between the metaphor-

ically fused extremes of self and cosmos. In a way, this distancing of the poet as celebrator of sacramental love or priest of nature was an answer to the problem of the loss of the Wordsworthian "visionary gleam" detailed in Thomas's letters and in various poems studied above as being in the tradition of the Romantic dejection ode ("Where Once the Waters of Your Face," "How Shall My Animal"). Although not consistently estranged from nature in the later poems, Thomas seldom seeks a total identity of inner and outer by way of polysemous metaphor as he so often does in the early poems. Rather, he tends to preside over the action of his poems like an on-stage narrator in a play. In addition to this new "placement" of the poetic self within the poem, "A Refusal to Mourn" is a masterful example of the Romantic displacement of the Christian myth into secular terms. As critics have noted, Thomas quite consciously and deliberately embeds within his elegiac statements about the child, himself, and the child's future existence as a part of nature, language that makes the psychic and the physical life of all creation and of the single life of the human being correspond to significant stages in the Christian myth: creation (st. 1), Old Testament Judaism (st. 2), New Testament Christianity (st. 3), and, in a significant historical addition, Romantic pantheism (st. 4), which is also a return to the Genesis and creation of stanza 1. As Thomas's imagery clearly indicates, however, his use of Christian myth, so powerfully impressed upon him in numerous sermons heard in the Welsh chapels of his boyhood, does not make this a Christian poem any more than the early poems were Christian in their display of the Romantic poet's assumption of his own Christhood through the exercise of imaginative powers, a Christhood residually evident here in the self-consciously powerful images that seek themselves to contain the resurrec-

tionist powers that the poet claims for nature, that here, as in most of the later poems, is simultaneously divine and physical.

Stanza 1: in a famous series of compound adjectives with the hyphen left out for ambiguity (ll. 1-3), Thomas magnificently recapitulates the arising of natural creation out of the void and begins to tell us the only conditions (the impending end of all things in an apocalypse of dark stillness) under which he would mourn the child's death. Feminine rhymes and the rhythmic contraction and expansion of the lines evoke a sense of awe and majestic orderliness in nature from Creation to Apocalypse, Not a god but "darkness" is the fertile source of "bird beast and flower" (echoing Lawrence) as well as man, all of whom the darkness is first "making" and then "humbling." Nature resolves all opposites as a series of phrases shows: "never until (instead of "not until"), "tells with silence," "last light breaking," "still hour / Of the sea tumbling." Even "breaking" can mean breaking into existence or breaking up, thus rendering a picture of ceaseless transformation of life and death, light and dark. The image of the sea as a horse "tumbling in harness" recalls the line in "Fern Hill" where Thomas again associates horses (horse = imagination in occult symbolism) with the earliest moments of creation ("In the first spinning place, spell-bound horses"). Immediately, then, the child's death is placed against the most sublime background, so far removed from the particular issues of a particular war as to create an almost savagely satirical reduction of that war in the pregnant silence of its absence from this stanza. Carrying over into stanza 2 and the first line of stanza 3, this long opening sentence moves from the cosmic perspective of stanza 1 to the self-centering perspective of stanza 2 and 3, line 1. Never until all of created nature falls back again into the void, the poet says, and I

too must die and become a part of the pantheistic ceremonies of natural process, shall I pray or weep for the child that died by fire. A comparison of stanza 1 to stanza 3 may yield my one original contribution to the large body of criticism on this poem. If Thomas says in stanza 1 that he will not mourn the child till all of nature collapses into primeval darkness, then is it accurate to say next (st. 2) that he will not mourn the child until his own personal re-entry into the cycle of nature through death? Two resolutions suggest themselves: either the "I" of the poem is not simply the poetic self but the voice of nature or of all mankind, or, more likely the apparent discrepancy accounts for the feature of stanza 1 that Thomas's detractors find most irritating -- his omission of several hyphens in compound adjectives in lines 1-3. The omission, present too in many other poems by Thomas, is usually a device for fostering ambiguity or simultaneous statement. By omitting the hyphens, Thomas allows the first stanza not only to say that darkness makes man, bird, beast, and flower but also that external nature exists only so long as mankind perceives it (cf. "When I Woke"). Thus we may read: "mankind" (or the poet's human perceptivity), which makes bird, beast, and flower and which humbles the very darkness itself, tells, with its own silence at death and its breaking light of perception, that its own death has come. This reading, which complements the traditional reading of "darkness" as the subject of "tells," links subjective perception to objective events, the single life and cosmic life. Further refinements are possible in stanza 1: taking "mankind" as the grammatical subject, we read the first two lines to mean that mankind, in its perception and naming of external objects -- the creatures and plants in nature -- in effect gives them life. This isolation of "mankind" as a sort of perception

(man kind) occurs again in stanza 3 where it is "the mankind of her going" that distinguishes the child, the humanity of her death.

In effect, human perception of nature is an heroic act of imaginatively sustaining the outer world, Atlas-like (cf. "atlas-wise" in Sonnet X of Altarwise), an act that inevitably exhausts the individual who then escapes this heroic self-consciousness and imaginative perception by being absorbed into the pantheistic universe at death. This is what happens in stanza 2 whose first two lines may now be accurately related to the ambiguously dual subjects (mankind/darkness) of stanza 1. If stanza 1 sees the single human life and the history of nature as parallel to Christian Creation, stanza 2 takes us into the Old Testament for sacramental images of the self's final fusion with nature:

> And I must enter again the round
> Zion of the water bead
> And the synagogue of the ear of corn.

Depending on whether one reads "beads" as the beads of the rosary, one could argue that the poet's impending immersion in nature is at first incomplete, as Judaism was completed (from the Christian point of view) by Christ's life and death. The "round / Zion" enjambment isolates "round" to mean cycle, eternity, or the void of death, probably the second of these most of all. The auxiliary "must" and adverb "again" reinforce what "water bead" and "ear of corn" (= wheat) tell us clearly: that this is a pantheistic immersion of the self in the natural-supernatural world, not a Christian afterlife that depends on moral choice and belief, the borrowed sacramental imagery being used to bring out the divinity in nature, not nature as the handiwork of a transcendent being. In stanza 2, lines 4-6, the poet's formulaic refusal to mourn parallels his forecast (ll. 1-3) of his future life in nature: "water bead" is echoed in the poet's refusal to cry ("sow my salt seed," as

the Romans did at Carthage) and "the ear of corn" (whose grains are seated worshippers packed in nature's synagogue) is matched by the poet's refusal to pray "the shadow of a sound." His own body, or perhaps punningly the wrinkles of the bags under his eyes, is the "least valley of sackcloth," a "valley" as before (by implication) a whole city and its environs to be salted, a partial self/world comparison that reinforces my reading of stanza 1. Stanza 3 begins with an ending, line 13 of the poetic sentence that began the poem. Finally we learn that the poet will not mourn "the majesty and burning of the child's death." Recalling Southwell's poem on Christ, "The Burning Babe" and Thomas's short story "The Burning Baby," this line makes the child a figure of unbroken unity of being, escaping both adulthood and Christianity, for an eternity of deathlessness in nature.

Moving farther along in Christian myth as analogue, Thomas, in stanza 3, describes her death as a naturalistic crucifixion ("the mankind of her going"). Her refuses to utter the "grave truth" of the Anglican burial service nor will he "blaspheme" down his own "stations of the breath" by speaking of the self-evident innocent youthfulness of the child. A Romantic displacement of the "stations of the cross" into the poet's own poem-speaking "stations of the breath" (breath pauses in recitation?), the phrase is obscured somewhat by "further." If Thomas refuses to mourn at all, how can he now refuse to make "any further / Elegy"? Walford Davies' general comment on this poem that "what /Thomas/ refuses to do is to fall in pious lament or propaganda" (SP 124) means that Thomas is refusing to add any traditional elegiac commentary to, let us say, tabloid newspaper accounts and possibly photographs of the sensationalistic death of a burning child.

Stanza 4: having developed his feelings about the child and pantheism by displacing Genesis, Judaism, and Christianity into Romantic personalism, Thomas completes the cycle in stanza 4 by touching briefly on Genesis again before moving, without any further analogy to the Christian myth, into direct statements about the union of self and nature according to Romantic doctrine. Although she is "London's daughter," the child is not associated with a single image from the modern cityscape. Instead, she escapes the city, the war, and adulthood's estranging self-consciousness to join "the first dead," Adam and Eve as well as the Londoners first killed in the air raids. Lying "deep" with the dead because free now of the transient superficiality of merely human life (important, but less central than her life in nature), the child, as Edith Sitwell aptly noted, undergoes "a sacred investiture" as she is "robed in the long friends." Now a priestess of nature as the poet is a priest, she joins the mysteriously "long friends" who may or may not be in apposition to "the grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother." Three richly suggestive phrases, the first makes priestly whatever the child unites with in nature, robes being long as friends are, while friends, a human relationship, by being extended into the child's afterlife in nature, humanize that world. Including various manifestations of natural force, the friends include the "grains" or essential elements of the created world -- molecules or atoms that cannot die, as well as nature herself as maternal ("her mother"), a womb, mine, or city (the underground system of London whose "daughter" she is, having hid there often during raids?), all of which may have "dark veins." She lies "secret" because, among men, only the poet knows her pantheistic afterlife, though like the poet who refuses to mourn, the great river Thames is equally aware of

her fate. Thus Thomas writes of the "unmourning water / Of the riding Thames," linking himself to the almost personified natural force, Father Thames, that governs the ending of the poem in a way that the city of London (out of which the Thames takes the child) never does. Like the "sea tumbling in harness" of stanza 1, the Thames is "riding," still pristine, as the horse-filled Eden of "Fern Hill." The stateliness of the "riding Thames" brings to mind Spenser's "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song" in Prothalamion, a not inappropriate association to make for Thomas's unmourning pseudo-elegy celebrates the child's marriage to nature and nature's ongoing fertile power of renewal.

The poem's final line -- "After the first death, there is no other" -- has, in its perfect ambiguity, provoked more critical commentary than any other single line in Thomas's poetry. One could argue that Thomas is hedging his bets, saying simultaneously that after we die we cease forever to exist and also that after we die we live eternally. A further possibility, based on the early gestation poems, is that birth is the "first death," the fall into self-consciousness and estrangement from the heaven-womb; that death is absolute, so there can be no other. I would add that still another possibility is that the usual assumption that "other" means "other death" may be wrong. Rather, "other" could mean "that which is external to the self," a state of self/other division being what is ended in the child's pantheistic re-entry. However, I have always felt that Thomas conceived this line not in a hedging spirit but in a spirit of wanting to make a minimally true statement that was beyond refutation. Christian, atheist, pantheist, or reincarnationalist beliefs can all be accommodated by the statement that might be called Thomas's original contribution to the Ramantic tradition of the polysemous metaphor: the

polysemous statement!

Fairchild is right in seeing "A Refusal to Mourn" as "loyal to traditional romantic pantheism," and, as John Ackerman and Walford Davies (SP 124) have noted, the comparison with Wordsworth's Lucy poem "A slumber did my spirit seal" is almost irresistible.[41] Olson, in an uncharacteristically harsh commentary, finds too much Thomas and not enough child in the poem, though he links Thomas to Keats, Byron, Yeats, and Eliot in Thomas's ability to "create his own world in his own image . . . [to] remain the center of his own thought and feeling."[42] Less true of "A Refusal to Mourn" than of earlier poems, for reasons stated at the beginning of this analysis, Olson's comments could have been supported by the argument that, although this is never stated directly, much of the pantheistic "truth" of the poem depends on the poet's ability to exercise imagination to create powerful images that persuade us to believe him -- an idea fully documented in earlier Thomas poems. In addition to William Empson's remarkably thorough analysis (for 1947, when most critics had not "adjusted" to Thomas's style), I think Jacob Korg has written the best general statement on this central poem: "the effect of the metaphors involving traditional religious symbols is . . . to suffuse the elements of nature with 'sacredness' and . . . to imply that the recognized religions are only provisional forms of the permanent holiness of nature . . . the holy symbols stand within the greater holiness of the cosmos; the sacredness of which is primary and intrinsic in the water is secondary and arbitrary with regard to Zion . . . the general effect of the poem is . . . a working out of the opposition between the pathetic event of the child's death and an austere recognition of universal process, between rites consecrated by human agreement and the elements of nature."[43] To this

statement need be added only the significant shift of Thomas's "poetic self" within the poem from the center of activity to a crucial but peripherally situated stance as priestly celebrator and human witness of a natural rite.

The last war poem to be considered is "Ceremony after a Fire Raid" (P 173-75), a poem considered by some critics as Thomas's best and by others as a stupendous failure to match subject and rhetoric. In many ways a more elaborate version of the situation in "A Refusal to Mourn," this poem again deals with the death by fire of a child in London and the presiding priest is again Father Thomas the Poet who is again displacing Christian rituals and sacraments into secular, poetic contexts. Written in three sections marked by Roman numerals, the poem follows rather impressionistically what Thomas considered to be an Anglican service. Critics familiar with the Anglican ritual have made some guesses as to what portions of what services these sections approximate: Section I is said to resemble an incantation, prayer, chant, or hymn; Section II a meditation, eucharistic homily, collect, or sermon; and Section III a gloria, postlude, or organ voluntary.[44] Thomas himself wrote to his pious Anglican friend Vernon Watkins about this problem: "Will you tell me about it? It really is a Ceremony, and the third part of the poem is the music at the end. Would it be called a voluntary, or is that only music at the beginning?" (SL 265). The OED has "voluntary" as "a piece or solo played upon the organ before, during, or after any office of the Church" and A. T. Davies, who is a bit too anxious to see Thomas as a Christian, does report that he saw Thomas reading a book by Maurice Zundel called Splendour of the Liturgy; however, Watkins, who knew both his religion and his friend Thomas, is on record as saying that if Thomas was any sort of Christian it had to be one like Blake:

"I would call Dylan a Blakean Christian, but even that would be only an approximation" (Life 262). Appropriating church traditions for his own use, Thomas remains Romantic, the priest of his own religion in which the poetry is the sacrament and its evocative powers coupled with the sacrament of divine and sexual love the only source of miracles. Thomas's imaginative fusion of himself with the burning child, is, as William Moynihan says, a Romantic act, for "the poet sees himself a creature like Whitman, of many selves interrelated with all other creatures."[45] Similarly, Tindall notes (RG 224) that, in this poem, "Thomas' services . . . are forms for embodying and offering the sense of holiness and glory -- not Christian holiness, which lends the form, but a holiness like Wordsworth's 'spirit of religious love in which I walked with nature'." Walford Davies also suggests (SP 122) that at the poem's end "what will survive is not the Christian ritual and sacrament as such, but the inevitable, sexual force of life."

In addition to these warnings to read the Christian rituals and sacraments as "displaced," an excellent analysis of the narrator of this poem exists in Leslie Wolfe's unpublished dissertation on Thomas.[46] Wolfe argues persuasively that Sections I, II, and III represent three varieties of mental action in response to the child's death: emotional, rational, and finally, imaginative (i.e., Romantic). The inadequacy of the first two partial responses is indicated by the use of "we" and then "I" as narrators, while Section III, a regenerative vision, is imaginative and thus an integrated response of all faculties of the mind and told from an omniscient point of view. The dominance of fire imagery in Section I, ceremonial imagery in Section II, and the fusion of fire and ceremonial imagery in Section III, Wolfe shows, is an argument in images for the same movement toward unity of being and response. Thus,

she rightly concludes, the poem is a record of inner and outer processes presented simultaneously: "the poem celebrates the creative act of the poet's imagination which achieves the creation of the magnificent ceremony."[47] To Wolfe's analysis I would add that the number of stanzas in the three sections (4, 2, 1) by a sort of undoubling process also imitates the poem's mental action. To all these analyses, I would like to add a reading of the poem that concentrates on the figure of the poet as priestly celebrator, whose own poetic language is his secular scripture, and whose only miracle is the ability to release a redeeming love (both sexual and divine) into the world. A second focus of concern will be the poet's straightforward discussion in this poem of his understanding of the Eden myth that permeates his poems. Finally, in Section III, some new light may be cast on the opening lines by comparing these lines and the Romantic figure of the child to some verse captions done by Thomas for a war film.

Section I: at once the priest and his own congregation of various selves, the poet describes the death of the child (st. 1), sings a hymn (st. 2), prays to the child for forgiveness (st. 3), and chants (st. 4) that the child be resurrected by the power of love. Stanza 1: uniting himself to the grievers, the poet himself has fallen into psychic division

> Myselves
> The grievers
> Grieve

because of the death of a child, Romantic figure of unity of being, burned to death on its mother's charred breast with "its arms full of fires." Stanza 2: addressing his divided selves, the poet says that the death of the child is due to the poet's own failure to defeat the war by an exercise of imagination, the argument that we have seen in

other war poems. Now the poet's congregated selves must

> Begin
> With singing
> Sing

in order to reverse the crumbling back of the "light" of the child into primeval chaos: the selves must thus "Sing / Darkness kindled back into beginning." Shocked earlier by the child's death, the poet's "caught tongue nodded blind," the result of which was a withdrawal of imaginative energy that saw the child as one with "a star," the embodiment of human unity with upper nature. The poet's tongue having fallen silent, that star was "broken / Into" or shattered into "the centuries of the child" for the child, who, like the child in "Fern Hill," lived "below a time" in unbroken continuity with nature, has now, like the poet whose single poetic self has been similarly shattered into "myselves," has fallen, by the gross violence of war, out of its natural state of happy communion with the natural world. Thus, the poet repeats, "myselves, grieve now," for the removal of the child's unifying example has led to the adult poet's collapse into psychic division, and Christian "miracles cannot atone" for the loss. Stanza 3: asking forgiveness for his selves for the failure of the "caught tongue" to keep the child alive, the poet says that he shall absorb the dust, blood, and death of the child into his multiple heart. Calling the selves "the believers," Thomas reminds us that in the Notebooks he used the words "belief" and "faith" to mean the exercise of imagination upon the outer world so as to alter that world. Also, in poems like "Especially When the October Wind" and "After the Funeral," he associates the release of imagination with the Christ-like shedding of the poet's own redemptive blood (poetry). With these precedents to add to stanza 2, we are justified in seeing in stanza 3 not only a

sacramental, pantheistic absorption of the dead child into the poet's selves (thus reintegrating them) but also the assertion that the exercise of imagination in the very act of writing this poem will transform the dead child. Thus, we have a description of the poetic process in the assertion that the believers will hold the child's death

> in a great flood
> Till the blood shall spurt
> And the dust shall sing like a bird
> As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart.

An expressivist poet whose poems originate in the heart, Thomas also uses Noah, survivor of the great flood, as the type of the artist in "Author's Prologue," his final finished poem (P 3-5). Birds, grains, and death that grows make the child and poem organic. In any case, the poet has absorbed the child into his many-selved body and poetic imagination ("our heart" = the reunion of separate selves into one heart by way of the child's death). Stanza 4: bemoaning his inability to resurrect the individual child physically ("child beyond cockcrow" of dawn and temptation), the poet says that his selves will "chant the flying sea / In the body bereft" to put out its fires and to cause the child to be reabsorbed into the organic life ("flying") of nature. As "chant" implies that the poetic process is a sacramental act, so the chant's effective calling up of the sea implies that the heroic exercise of imagination can affect outer nature. Linking the creative Word and the poet's words, words and things, poetic process and the relationship-bringing "love" that it releases, Thomas says that "Love is the last light spoken." Still to be lamented, however, are the sons that never were but died in the child's "black husk." The chanted "flying sea," incidentally, may be not only nature activated by imagination but poems as well, for Thomas, as noted in Chapter III, called poems "flying fish

islands" and in "Reminiscences of Childhood (II)" the boy flies over the town of his childhood past as his imagination creates a place where memories have no order and no end.

Section II: if Section I parallels the introductory phase of a church service -- singing, chanting, prayer -- Section II is rightly identified as a collect (a short prayer with one topic) or a sermon. The subject of Thomas's sermon is the nature of the Eden myth. Falling in line with Frye's explanation of the Romantic myth, Thomas discusses directly the Eden myth as an aspect of childhood consciousness, an inner, psychic event, a sense of sacramental unity with unfallen nature that is horribly perverted by the fiery death of the child. Coming to understand the nature of myth and adding to Section I's emotional response a rational one here (as Wolfe argues), the poet's "myselves" of Section I are reintegrated into the single poetic "I" who lectures to us on myth in two stanzas instead of the four of Section I. The opening lines of stanza 1 and 2 ("I know not whether" / "I know the legend") define the limits of rational understanding beyond which only myth can reveal truths. Stanza 1: in a single magnificent verse sentence of 14 lines, Thomas admits that he does not know which of the traditional components of the Eden myth "Was the first to die / In the cinder of the little skull." That "Eden" is a psychological state is clear from its placement in the child's "skull." The union of male and female with the psyche ("Adam and Eve"), sacrificial animals that link the natural and the divine ("adorned holy bullock / Or the white ewe lamb"), or a "chosen virgin" who, like this very virgin child herself, links the human and the divine in many myths -- all these existed in the child's mind, for according to the Romantic myth the events of the Christian myth are internalized and made to represent the phases of

the relation of self and world. Lamenting the loss of psychic unity and the Edenic consciousness ("O bride and bridegroom / O Adam and Eve together"), Thomas links the child's very skull ("headstone") to the now destroyed Eden:

> O Adam and Eve together
> . . . . . .
> Under the sad breast of the head stone
> White as the skeleton
> Of the garden of Eden.

Eden remains contained within a (human) skeleton, Eden becomes a state of mind, a relation to nature, horribly destroyed by German bombs.

Stanza 2: invoking the Eden myth one final time, the poet links himself to the child for both poet's imagination and child's Edenic state of mind affirm creation and unity, not collapse and estrangement, as now, with the child's death, threaten. The opening three lines are important lines for much of Thomas's work:

> I know the legend
> Of Adam and Eve is never for a second
> Silent in my service.

The key words are "legend" (the Eden myth as a device to describe psychic states, not a part of orthodox doctrine) and "my service" (the poet as priest of the church of imagination and love and no other). Just as the poet's "myselves" are reintegrated into the single poetic "I," so the "dead infants" of all the fire raids are made one in

> the one
> Child who was priest and servants
> Words, singer, and tongue
> In the cinder of the little skull.

Just as the poet is priest of his own imagination, so within its own skull was the child both priestly and poetic, conducting the ritual of the integration of mental faculties. Alive, the child's Edenic mind caused "the serpent's nightfall," postponing the "sin" of adult consciousness, Eve's fruit being a "sun" to this "star." Now dead, the

child represents the division of the psyche ("man and woman undone") and the collapse, after the cessation of imaginative pressure or "faith," of outer creation and inner psychic wholeness:

> Beginning crumbled back to darkness
> Bare as the nurseries
> Of the garden of wilderness.

Eden becomes wasteland, the Romantic child dies in its crib, the psychic state it represents, a balance of opposing light and dark, collapses into the primeval void.

Section III: Thomas's self-confessed organ voluntary written in full-blown grandiloquent rhetoric, this extraordinary, all-affirming stanza, so utterly against much of the Modernist grain, usually moves critics to tears or revulsion. Thomas's recording of this poem, and especially of this stanza, is a masterpiece, even though one's taste may not be for poems like this. The single stanza, absorbing "we" and "I" into a universal point of view that includes all opposites and standpoints, describes burning London being innundated by the "flying sea" of nature of Section I, incited to action by the sacramental service of this poem itself. Christian symbols -- cathedrals, urn of sabbaths, steeples -- are burning. Out of the fiery apocalypse of burning London arises the New Jerusalem of the dead -- "the golden pavements laid in requiems"; but this desperate picture is transformed, first, by a picture of natural sacramentalism -- a burning wheatfield and vinyard whose "bread" and "wine" burn holily -- and, secondly, by the engulfing tides of the sea that are bearing children in "masses" that are both sacramental and merely quantitative. This sea reverses the destruction of war in the poem's final, unrestrained lines:

> The masses of the sea
> The masses of the sea under

> The masses of the infant-bearing sea
> Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter forever
> Glory glory glory
> The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

Invoked by the poet's as nature's priest, the tides down the cathedrals -- an image of the immanence of divinity in nature or the subconscious mind that we have seen before in Thomas. As a final point, could the apocalypse of Section III be an inner, psychic event as well as obviously being a visionary one that obliterates inner and outer? Tindall recalled the passage in Thomas's essay on Wilfred Owen in which Thomas spoke of the "bell of the church of the broken body" of the dying soldier poet. Could the "luminous cathedrals" of Section III be the "dead infants" of Section II, thus making the immersion of the cathedrals in the infant-waters of the evoked sea symbolic of two events: a reunion of child and nature and a reunion of the child's own divided psyche (fire/water becoming one)? The first event recalls Thomas's early short story "The Burning Baby" in which yet another incendiary child (this time, a cremated corpse) set aflame is linked with the outer landscape: "A flame touched its tongue. Eeeeeh cried the burning baby, and the illuminated hill replied" (EPW 28). The second event, requiring that the child be its own cathedral as Owen's body was said to be its own church, is further supported by a previously uncited passage from Thomas's "Our Country," a war film about London during the air raids for which Thomas provided poetic captions. One caption reads:

> . . . birds flying
> . . . . . .
> around the . . .
> burned-black city areas killed at night;
> and all the stones remember and sing the cathedral of each blitzed dead body that lay or lies in the bomber-and-dove-flown-over cemeteries of the dumb, heroic streets.
> (QEOM/US 55-56)

If the "luminous cathedrals" are also burning children, the erupting

oceanic masses are masses performed in these cathedrals, thus creating the "ultimate kingdom" of psychic wholeness within and a sacramental oneness with nature without. This "ultimate kingdom" of the Romantic poet is the final resolution of all divisiveness, a final kingdom whose reigning monarchs are imagination and love.

Three Longer Poems on Love: "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait," "A Winter's Tale," and "Vision and Prayer." Three long poems written between 1941 and 1945 show the single theme that runs through most of Thomas's poems during the 1936-45 period: that is, the investigation of the various forms of love and of the ways love has of overcoming the separation of the self and the world or of unifying the divergent aspects of the psyche. The earliest of these poems is the extraordinary "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait" (P 161-69), Thomas's longest poem, composed of 54 ballad quatrains but with great variation on the traditional 4343 ballad stanza pattern and the abcb rhyme scheme. The only instance of Thomas's using the ballad, this poem is an example of the Romantic ballad, a consciously appropriated traditional form put to a more sophisticated use than any of the anonymous ballads. As Karl Kroeber says in his study Romantic Narrative Art, the Romantics developed the "literary ballad" as "a means of treating the harsh actualities of experience in dramatically symbolic fashion" and doing so with "a richness of psychological response" absent in the old ballads.[48] As a narrative form, the ballad could accommodate another Romantic form -- the internalized quest, circuitous journey, or quest-romance of the self -- to use the various names given it by Bloom, Abrams, and Frye. We may recall here Frye's discussion of the quest romance in "The Romantic Myth": a romance whose hero is the poet, whose goal is the attainment of unity between nature and the poet's expanded consciousness, the achieve-

ment of apocalyptic vision, and the regeneration of nature and the self.[49] Abrams' comprehensive definition of this circuitous journey of self-education by self-transcendence includes the elements of a fall from primal unity into division, the overcoming of division by means of the feminine other, and the attainment of a new, higher synthesis at the end that incorporates all intervening opposites and also the original, now perceivably inadequate unity, into a new whole.[50] Thomas's "Ballad," a complex poem that has been interpreted in widely differing ways, meets many of the requirements of the Romantic quest poem and the Romantic ballad. Dealing with psychological events projected outward into a narrative of a sea journey, the subject is the integration of the conscious and unconscious mind, or reason and imagination, the male and female aspects of the psyche, and the attainment, with that unity, of the regeneration of nature itself. This regeneration occurs at the poem's climax (st. 42f.) when Eden itself rises up, by means of the woman, from the waters of the unconscious, in a directional movement that Frye reminds us is especially Romantic: the location of "heaven" <u>down</u> and <u>in</u> (in nature and the mind), not <u>up</u> and <u>out</u> (beyond nature and man).[51]

Critics of the "Ballad" fall into three camps: (1) those who interpret the poem as Christian allegory, (2) those who interpret the poem as symbolizing the growth from adolescence to manhood and the changing views on sexuality associated with both phases of life, and (3) critics who read the poem as a narrative of projected psychic events, a view I share and hope to develop. The Christian critics are led by Elder Olson whose formulation of the theme of the "Ballad" is well known: "salvation must be won through mortification of the flesh."[52] The "Ballad" describes a fisherman's leaving land and harbor to fish on

the sea with a live woman, a hook through her lips, for bait. After fighting off her aquatic lovers and enduring a storm, the fisherman finally sees the girl violated, repeatedly, by the marine life, after which the fisherman hauls up both girl and the "catch" attached to her. This "catch" is no less than all human ancestry all the way back to the Garden of Eden itself. With this catch the fisherman (who is also the poet, of course) heads home; and as he does, the land rises up out of the sea and he returns to his home. Olson, stressing Thomas's Puritan upbringing that caused him residual guilt feelings about sex all his life, sees the narrative as a moral allegory. Neuville and Reddington concur with Olson while Leach inadequately argues that the narrative of the story is Christ's incarnation.[53] The main objection to these views is that the hero-fisherman does not reject sexual love as much as incorporate it into a wider view of love and that Christian images and allusions, though present, are fewer than in other poems, in all of which in any case, as has been argued before, Romantic displacement has occurred.

The second group of critics reads the poem as a symbolic enactment of the change of attitude toward sex from adolescent obsession to adult experience of marriage, parenthood, and a lessening of sexual desire and power. Condon argues that Thomas is rejecting his adolescent view of sex, pregnancy, gestation, and childbirth; similarly, Maud calls the poem an "allegorizing of the sex cycle"; while Tindall (RG 248f.), in the best example of this kind of analysis, links the adolescent/manhood theme to Thomas's normally concurrent theme of the process of poetic creation.[54] These analyses (except Tindall's) suffer only by being too limited, for Thomas usually uses the sex cycle as a vehicle, not simply a tenor, a way of describing the Romantic psycholo-

gizing of the phases of the Christian myth.

The third group of critics, using various terminologies, clusters around the Romantic concerns associated with the literary ballad and quest-romance discussed above. In one way or another, these critics see the "Ballad" as most deeply concerned with two related Romantic themes: (1) the achievement of psychic wholeness and (2) the union of man and nature. In an impressionistic but very suggestive essay comparing Thomas's "Ballad" to Rimbaud's Bateau Ivre (Thomas knew no French but could have read this poem in translation), Glauco Cambon describes the poem as an attempt to overcome the boundaries of the ego by way of sexual mysticism in order to attain a cosmic perspective and to achieve "the resurrection of earth." The girl used as bait is like Coleridge's albatross in "The Ancient Mariner," he says, for each is "the sacrificial victim whereby the voyage to Hades (deep, unveiled reality) is made possible."[55] A more detailed analysis is Suzanne Ferguson's important Jungian essay whose argument is that the poem is a "quest for integration of personality (individuation), a quest both personal and . . . universal." Separating narrator (ego), fisherman (Shadow), and the girl-bait (Anima), Ferguson reads the narrative as a projection of psychic events whose end result is the attainment of inner harmony that allows the poet a vision of outer, Edenic harmony. The poem is thus a "transformational quest" whose aim is "the integration of personality."[56] Similar to Ferguson's reading is Robert Burdette's. Burdette analyzes this poem as an example of Gnostic belief. Although cluttered up with the airy jargon of occultism, Burdette's analysis does reinforce Ferguson's in saying that the poem deals with a division in the psyche and the division of the self from an original Cosmic Adam that existed prior to the Platonic "fall" of all things into the material world.[57]

Using less doctrinaire terminology, Clark Emery sees the "Ballad" as related to Blake's hatred of the association of guilt and sensuality and Coleridge's concern with the ancient mariner's "deviation from right love." Thomas, Emery argues, is interested in understanding love as a "formalizing power," a "creative force modifying chaos" in the outer world (WDT 123-28).

Finally, Korg also sees the poem as a resolution of a spiritual and psychological conflict, the sea voyage as "an excursion of imagination," but he views the fisher-hero's return to land at the end as Thomas's confession of "the loss of imaginative power" exercised on the sea.[58] I would like to offer a simplified version of the readings of these last critics in order to find common ground among their divergent terminologies. In my view, the "Ballad" is a poem about the quest for psychic unity and for a vision of a spiritualized, regenerated nature, these inner and outer processes being linked by love, a sexual and spiritual power, embodied in the girl-bait, who effects the union of sea and land (unconscious/conscious mind) and who causes Eden to rise up from the sea (unfallen nature rising up out of fallen nature and the human mind).

My thesis may seem far apart from at least one comment made by Thomas on this poem. Given to self-parodic reductions in his embarrassed descriptions of his own poems, Thomas, according to Brinnin, once silenced conversation at a New York party: "His one-sentence explanation of the central meaning of his Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait was so lewd and searing as to stop conversation altogether" (DTA 25). Twenty-two years later, in his 1977 biography of Thomas, Ferris was able to print the statement: "'It's a description of a gigantic fuck'" (Ferris 232). In more sober moments, Thomas thought rather highly of the poem. To

Davenport he wrote: "I've just finished my Ballad . . . It's about 220 lines long, a tremendous effort for me, & is really a ballad . . . At the moment, I think it's the best I've done" (SL 252). Tindall recalls a New York bar conversation with Thomas on the poem: "a young man, he said, goes fishing for sexual experiences . . . but the fisherman 'catches the church and the village green'" (RG 248). This is a true but rather literal summary. In a little known piece by Kathleen Raine, Thomas is reported to have said that the "Ballad", on which he was then working, would be one of the greatest poems of the century.[59] The arduous nature of writing such a long poem is revealed in Thomas's comment to Reid, cited earlier, that writing the "Ballad" was like carrying an armful of words up steep stairs, for, he said, he always conceived of words and things as one -- a remark that supports the view that this poem deals with the problem of unity and division.[60] Finally, a note by Vernon Watkins exists in which he says that Thomas drew a picture to go with the poem: a woman lying at the bottom of the sea, "a new Loreley revealing the pitfalls of destruction awaiting those who attempted to put off the flesh" (Ferris 342). This interpretation of Thomas's picture certainly seems to refute those critics who follow Olson in seeing the poem as dealing with the mortification of the flesh. In any case, the poem itself must be examined in light of Thomas's remarks and those of the three major groups of critics.

Stanza 1-6: the fisherman's departure on his sea voyage. Leaving the "coast" near dusk, the hero (= fisherman/poet) makes the transition from commonplace to visionary experience. In a line similar to that in "Kubla Khan" describing the Romantic poet in the act of creation ("His flashing eyes, his floating hair"), Thomas describes the hero's "thrashing hair and whale-blue eye" as the hero begins his imaginative journey.

Significantly, Thomas personifies the sea town and seashore landscape, both of which urge on the hero in his quest. The coast "took a last look," the "affectionate sand" says farewell, and the "looking land" tells the hero that "for my sake /you must/ . . . never look back." The hero, then, is a man already closely allied to a sentient nature, yet he is almost an agent of nature's own higher, visionary form. Equally, this is an inner quest, the rational existence of man in a human community being supplemented by the search of imagination (his "whale-blue eye") from non-rational experience. Going into the "drinking dark" with his wind-drinking sails, the hero sails into the dark of his own inner self, a radically subjective perspective indicated by two images of other ships near land: "funnels and masts went by in a whirl" and "the dwindling ships." Imagination replaces reason as the governing mental faculty of the poem in two Coleridgean lines: "The sun ship-wrecked west on a pearl / And the moon swam out of its hulk." Rising out of the west, the moon imagination seems "natural law" and reverses the procession of time, thus forecasting the regenerative vision to come. Casting his "gold gut that sings on his reel" into the sea, his weird bait, "a girl alive with a hook through her lips," powerfully "stalked out" of the bait sack to be cast into the sea. A suggestive symbol, whether of the anima or imagination, sexual love or natural vitalism, the girl will become the crucial link between land and sea (conscious/unconscious; reason/imagination; society/nature; fallen/unfallen nature). A bleeding bait, the girl is followed by fishes "rayed in blood," her sacrificial blood and/or their own. The flight of birds, who can live over land or sea, and the simultaneous rising of the hook-like anchor and lowering of the hook anchored with its girl-bait also foretell the hero's transition from the daytime, landlocked

world of ordinary experience to the nighttime, moon-governed world of visionary experience.

Stanzas 7-15: the storm and the pursuit of the girl-bait by the sea creatures. These stanzas represent the hero's uncertainty as to the nature of his experience. The point seems to be that nature is both erotic and divine, but the hero only sees it as erotic and degraded in an endless orgy of sexual cycles, a partial vision. Thus, as the hero's ship moves further from land he hears the last "good-bye" from the town where old women "spin in the smoke" like darkly prophetic fates. Sailing over the sea, the hero is significantly unaware that nature is divine, that the sea contains (yet another) sunken cathedral, immanent divinity and order within. Thus we are told: "He was blind to the eyes of candles / In the praying windows of waves." Unaware of spiritual immanence in the "sea," he fishes for purely sexual experience and apprehends nature as simply material in stanza 8. In stanza 9, visionary nature (physical and divine) in the form of "the lost cathedral / Chimes of the rocked buoys" tells the hero what he cannot yet understand about his sea-cast girl-bait: she, a symbol of love and the unifying power of imagination, will draw all opposites to her, the physical and the divine -- "horses and angels" (also = seahorses, angel-fish) -- and covenant-bearing "rainbow-fish" that "bend in her joys" unite the divine, the animal, the human, and the entire natural world with the girl, like mother earth, at the center. Asail on an imaginative voyage, the hero finds his boat "moonstruck," but the hero's inability to understand nature or love as anything other than lust is reflected in a terrible storm that, in allusions to Jesu, Judas (st. 12), a sea-sick sea, and whales whose lungs fall like Jericho's walls, seems equally to reflect nature's revulsion at the hero's reductive and

obstinate views. Though as yet uncaught, the girl attracts a large variety of sea animals, thus linking poet and seascape by "animal" intermediaries that share some of man's consciousness yet are undivorced from nature. Other levels of interpretation, too many to follow here, should at least be noted: the sea-creatures may be the poet's images, lured up from the unconscious by the anima-bait at the end of the poet's pencil ("rod"); also, the hero's phallic "rod" that hooks a girl who links them both a numinous nature (the sea's sunken cathedral) makes human love a sacrament that unites the human and the cosmic. Thus poetic creation, human love, and erotic pantheism are all simultaneously present in the narrative which is also a story of the reintegration of mental faculties supported by the land/sea, sun/moon, fisherman/girl-bait images.

Stanzas 16-21: the union of the sea creatures and the girl-bait, and the death of the bait. As the power of love, whether in human sexuality, nature, or the poetic process, the girl, in these stanzas, begins the linkage of the hero to the sea and its creatures. Thus, lines such as the following can be read as descriptions of the union of the self and the world, of conscious and unconscious, or a description of Romantic expressivist poetic process: "Gold gut is a lightning thread, / His fiery reel sings off its flames." Thomas also here locates the action of the sea voyage <u>inside</u> the hero: "the whirled boat <u>in</u> the burn of the blood." In fact, it is the boat, representing the hero's dawning awareness of the nature of his voyage, that tells us that the sea creatures (images/nature's members) from an octopus to a polar eagle and seals have made the girl-bait "their wives" in "huge weddings in the waves" (<u>wedding</u> = Romantic metaphor for man/nature communion). A divine ceremony imbedded in the natural world, a

wedding leads to other images of a spiritualized nature: the rocking boat, tugged by the bitten bait, becomes a bell tower, its mast a "bell-spire," and the boat detects below the sea the "gardens of the floor," a hint that sunken Eden will rise up from the sea as it does later on in the poem. To the hero, however, who, unlike his boat, can see only the satisfying of physical desire in the violation of the bait, it is "black news" that the bait is violated and that she finally dies a sacrificial death (though the hero does not know it as such).

Stanzas 22-32: the changes in nature caused by the girl-bait's sacrificial death. In this section, the hero begins to learn the nature of the girl-bait's sacrifice. Her union with the sea and its creatures causes him to see that sexuality as mere cupidity is a reductive view of love's power. The "wanting flesh his enemy" has been drowned as have the opposites of his fantasies of lust -- overly idealized dream women who plague the sleeping hero and cause psychic division: ". . . the selves asleep / Mast-high moon-white women naked." The girl's sacrifice, as Emery notes, illustrates love's unitary nature: sexual, sacramental, imaginative -- all in one. Thus, the hero loses his feeling of guilt about sex even at the moment that he realizes that love is more than sex. Susannah, Sheba, Lucifer, Sin, and Venus -- all symbols of pure sensuality -- are transformed in the girl-bait's "vaulted breath," vaulted because her sacrifice shows love and nature to be sacramental, the sea containing a sunken cathedral as a sort of skeleton, her breath one of its vaulted arches. The hero's vision of nature is transformed -- "white springs in the dark" -- and he is now prepared to witness the incredible aquatic resurrection that follows.

Stanzas 33-45: the hauling in of the fisherman's "catch." The sexual biting of the bait (love) by the creatures of the sea links sea

and hero (man/nature, poet/images, male/female, conscious/unconscious). The pulling up out of the sea of his gigantic catch represents, in addition to childbirth, the hero's attainment of a regenerative vision, occasioned by his new understanding of the power of love as a means of overcoming various divisions and in inciting the creation of poetry. Hauling up the bait, the hero finds clinging to her all his human ancestors and the Garden of Eden with all of its animals and vegetation. Thomas seems to be saying that when psychic unity, unity between man and nature, and the release of love as a sexual and spiritual force in the act of human love and in poetic creation occur, then one is capable of a visionary experience so total that Eden can be fully renewed. Rising out of the sea of nature and mind by means of the girl, Eden comes up from down and in, as Frye says Romantic paradises often do:

> The rod bends low, divining land,
> And through the sundered water crawls
> A garden holding to her hand
> With birds and animals.

As phallus and poet's pen, the rod, "divining land" below the sea (pulled down by the bitten girl-bait) actually divinizes the sea to make it over into Eden. The girl becomes both earth mother and world tree, all of regenerated creation her clinging brood:

> Insects and valleys hold her thighs hard,
> Time and places grip her breast bone,
> She is breaking with seasons and clouds.

The hero's ancestors (old men) who precede Eden in resurrection warn (st. 39) that time kills all created things, a fear allayed by love's transformation of them even as they speak out of partial ignorance:

> His fathers cling to the hand of the girl
> And the dead hand leads the past,
> Leads them as children and as air
> . . . . . .
> The centuries throw back their hair
> And the old men sing from newborn lips.

Stanzas 46-54: the emergence of the land out of the sea and the end of the fisherman's journey. At the first of the "Ballad," the poet left the land for the sea. At the end, an Edenic landscape rises up out of the sea. Although the sea sinks under the land that rises out of it, the sea makes that land a fusion of landscape and seascape (and thus of the values of "land" and "sea" outlined above): the "surge is sown with barley," "cattle graze on the covered foam," "wild sea fillies" run in the church-like "arched, green farms," and the "country tide" is filled with sea towns, unlike the cities (Rome, Sodom, London) associated with pure sensuality rejected by the hero earlier in the poem. Human order and natural order flow together as in two images coming city and water: "the floating villages" and "metropolis of fishes." The fisherman-hero, having witnessed these transformations, and having become aware of the awesome power of love, becomes terrified of the "furious ox-killing house of love." Going back to land as at the first of the poem, the hero detects only the "speech" of the sinking sea, that, like the unconscious mind or unfallen nature that it represents, now "sinks" to its usual place below the "land" of the conscious mind and rationally perceived nature. Still, as he ends his voyage, the hero drops his anchor into the sea where it hooks on "the floors of a church," the sunken cathedral that stands for divine power immanent in nature. Reversing the good-byes of the land-lubbers at the first of the poem, now "the sun and the moon" over the sunken sea say good-bye to the hero heading for land. That both sun and moon are shining at once and are personified reminds us that out over the sea from which Eden rose time was conquered and all opposites united into wholes. However, as almost all voyages of imagination must come to an end, so does this one. Back on the "land" of commonplace perception, the hero is "lost" and "alone," though he now knows the true

significance of the bait. No longer the "long-legged bait" of a girl, it is his own "long-legged heart" that the hero holds: for the heart, as the source of love and poetry, is Thomas's own poetic self that is the center of its search for a unifying relationship with nature and the faculties of the mind.

A complex poem whose details are difficult to incorporate into any one systematic account, the "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait" may, as Thomas's biographer FitzGibbon says, operate on "levels . . . too disparate to provide an architecturally successful edifice" (Life 236). Thus, speaking of the poem's closing section, Tritschler perceives "a transformation of nature" while Neuville calls the whole poem "a miniature religious ballad of man's redemption, not by Christ's grace, but by his own power." Conversely, Kohak finds the hero's return to land a terrible defeat by time and Korg, echoing the Romantic tradition of the dejection ode, sees in the return "the loss of imaginative power" that revealed the Eden-beneath-the-sea only to return to conventional life on shore.[61] Like the ancient mariner and other Romantic adaptations of the Wandering Jew figure[62], the fisher-poet may feel "lost" and "alone" on the land, in this case exactly because his Edenic vision is unshared by others. After all, he does hold "his long-legged heart in his hand" in the poem's final line; he and the long-legged bait are one, though like the mariner they return to their own country at the end. And finally, there is T. H. Jones's important remark that the narrative of the poem is an enactment of two verses from Revelations: "And the sea gave up its dead . . . And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Revelations 20:13, 21:1).[63] Of course, the crucial point, as Neuville says, is that neither God nor Christ but the poet himself

reveals this new heaven-on-earth, and his return to the "land" at the end only reminds us of what we learned in stanza 17: this voyage is an inner quest first of all, and therefore only the fisher-hero is able to see Eden rising from the sea of nature and mind. It is the poem "Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait" that must serve to bring others to the same state of mind that the hero has achieved and that now isolates him among those who have never sailed these strange seas.

Like the "Ballad" but without its almost surrealistic seascape, "A Winter's Tale" (P 187-91) is another fairly long narrative whose theme is the union of the self and nature through an agent of love, who, being female yet associated both with nature and the divine, also signifies an integration of mental faculties within the poet himself. Probably based on an old Welsh folktale, this poem, as W. S. Merwin first noted, is also based on pre-Christian mid-winter ceremonies celebrating the rebirth of nature in the springtime to come.[64] In greater part made up of imagistic catalogues of nature description, the poem tells the simple story of an old man who lived alone in a farmhouse in winter. Yearning to fulfill his "need" he prays by the power of "love" for a vision of nature in its unfallen, sacramental form. This vision is granted by a "she-bird" whom the old man pursues over the winter landscape until he dies. When he dies, nature returns to its fallen form but we are consoled by the knowledge that the old man's "death" was really a transformation brought about by union with the she-bird, which, as a highly suggestive symbol of sexual love, the anima, and divinity in nature, heals all the divisions within the old man's psyche and unites him with the visionary form of nature by taking him through the "door of his death" which is the door of perception that opens into the unfallen world. A pastoral poem whose winter landscape is

the simplified, deeply luminous landscape of primary colors intensely perceived of fairytales and British Christmas cards, "A Winter's Tale," as several critics have demonstrated, owes much of its vocabulary and theme to Keats's On the Eve of St. Agnes, a debt which will be examined at the end of this analysis. Although not particularized here as in the later poems, the pastoral landscape emerges as the stage for interaction between mind and nature (rather than the entire cosmos). In "A Winter's Tale," as in the greater Romantic lyric as defined by Abrams, there is the contrast between two "perceptions" of the landscape by the central figure, the old man; and although the narrator is separate from the old man, the narrator faithfully evokes in the poem's masterful pastoral images the two "states of mind" of the old man. As in the greater lyric, too, a central emotional and intellectual problem is faced and resolved: the question of how the old man can perceive unfallen nature and the resolution of that question by his union with the she-bird. Thus, "A Winter's Tale" cannot be called a pure example of the greater Romantic lyric, but it does partake of enough of the lyric's traits to demonstrate Thomas's ongoing concern with the self/world relation that in large part causes the greater lyric to emerge originally. Both the "Ballad" and "A Winter's Tale" also demonstrate the fusion of the quest-romance and a pastoral setting that Frye calls the literary form that accommodates the highest degree of identity between the human and the natural world.[65]

The twenty-six stanzas of "A Winter's Tale" may be divided into the following groupings: a description of the landscape (st. 1-2); the story of the old man and his "need" presented among more landscape description (st. 3-11); the opening of the man's eyes through love to a vision of unfallen nature, the arrival of the she-bird, and the old man's

pursuit of her till his "death" (st. 12-22); the fading of the vision of unfallen nature into the time-dominated natural cycles (st. 23-26) but with the consolation that the old man has united with the she-bird to enter visionary nature though "we" and the "narrator" remain behind.

Stanzas 1-2 (present tense): in five-line stanzas (ababa) highly sprung and with a heavy use of aural devices of all kinds to reinforce the images, Thomas describes a winter landscape that is ancient and pristine. The "tale" itself is "told" by nature, for the twilight "ferries" the tale over the lakes and "floating fields" to the narrator and to us. There is a latent sacramentalism in nature, presented but not emphasized too much: "the cup of the vales" contains the farm; the farmhouse has a monk's "cowl" of smoke, and the falling snowflakes are "hand folded" as in prayer. Yet the bitter winter landscape is also isolating: the farmhouse is a "frozen hold," a "far owl/Warning" is the bird of that knowledge that can accompany estrangement from nature, and "the stars falling cold" from the upper heavens remind us that the landscape we perceive is also "fallen" in the Romantic sense that our wrong perception of it makes it seem so.

Stanzas 3-11 (past tense): shifting into the past, the narrator has us meet the old man and learn of his "need" and his prayers for that need's fulfillment. Recalling that in Thomas's vocabulary "faith" and "belief" mean the self's imaginative assertion of its own desires against the outer world (cf. N 245-46), we can understand the crucial stanza 3 as follows: when the old man's earlier ability to perceive nature in its complete, unfallen form was lost ("when the world turned old"), the old man was isolated from nature ("torn and alone"). His desire (sexual, poetic /scrolls/) for reunion was projected into the capable imagination

On a star of faith . . .
. . . a man unrolled
The scrolls of fire that burned in his heart and head

-- to which compare Bloom's formula for Romantic apocalypse: "Love taken up into the Imagination"! Faith is imagination, and the star unfallen nature sustained by the old man's imaginative "belief." However, that belief needs the transforming power of love to sustain it. Thus, isolated in his farmhouse's "firelit island" (corresponding to the "star of faith") under the "fallen sky," the old man prays for love. Imagined farmers and milkmaids (st. 4-5) who will arise the next morning to begin their lives in harmony with nature represent an attraction but a lower order of unity between man and landscape than that which the old man desires. Stanzas 6-9 present more sacramental images embedded in nature, images that stand for powers that the old man's prayer can evoke. The "cup" of the vales and "the hand folded air" repeat earlier images as do the descriptions of the snow as "the cut bread," the "bread of water" (earlier: "the drifting bread"). The old man prays to an image of unfallen nature from which his power of perception separates him -- "the veiled sky" -- which is "the home of prayers / And fires." Estranged from the landscape and skyscape as well, the old man is "forsaken and afraid," and, in an image identifying him with the Romantic figure of a defiant Lucifer, he is "the hurled outcast of light." His "naked need" is for a wedding of the human self and the natural-supernatural world, the latter represented by the "inhuman cradle" (inhuman = the non-human, thus the divinity of nature) of the snow, his "bridebed," where he may escape self-consciousness by "losing him all in love . . . in the engulfing bride" who as natural and divine can cleanse his perception of "the time dying flesh astride." As a "believer lost" who wants to believe that union

with the female, the natural, and the divine is possible, the old man seeks the "desiring centre" where sexuality, divinity, and unfallen nature all meet in a single sacrament of total union.

Stanzas 12-22: an interweaving of three actions, these stanzas describe the appearance of the she-bird (st. 14), the unveiling of nature unfettered by death and time and informed by love (st. 12-13, 15-16), and the old man's pursuit of the she-bird over the snow to his death (st. 17-22). Framed each with direct commands ("Look," "Listen") stanzas 12-13 and 15-16 evoke a vision of unfallen nature with images of singing, dancing animals, stones, and trees that have all been raised from the "death" of the old man's perception prior to the arrival of the love-bestowing she-bird. Three lines are quite obviously echoes of Keats's "Grecian Urn" and either the Nightingale Ode or the lines on the dead nightingale in St. Agnes:

> Listen. The minstrels sing
> In the departed villages. The nightingale,
> Dust in the buried wood, flies on the grains of her wings.

Words and things coalesce as members of the natural world speak and sing: the nightingale "spells" the old man's tale and the "voice" of "dust of water" (snow) is "telling" the tale also. The image of the Romantic wind-harp that unites natural and poetic processes is also here to carry the old man's tale: "The carved mouths in the rock are wind-swept strings." Ancient dead horses gallop again and peasant "dancers move / On the departed, snow bushed green, wanton in moonlight" as love reveals a pastoral paradise. Druidic runes in rocks and letter-like veins of leaves unite poetry and nature:

> The carved limbs in the rock . . .
> . . . Calligraphy of the old
> Leaves is dancing.

And, in an image that sums up the union of man and nature in nature's

joyous retelling in its own voices the old man's tale and prayer for transformation, we are told that "the dead oak walks for love." The sacramental "parish of snow" has been purged of death and time. The reason for the she-bird's doing this is clearly spelled out: "For love, the long ago she bird rises." The old man's "burning bride" unites the opposites, being "with snow and scarlet downed," uniting passion and purity, heat and cold, the human female and the natural (bird) and the divine ("the woman breasted and the heaven headed / Bird"; st. 25-26). For an instant, as the old man looks upon the she-bird in nature's regenerated presence, there is a seemingly final unity:

> And the wild wings were raised
> . . . . . .
> . . . as though the she bird praised
> And all the elements of the snow fall rejoiced
> That a man knelt alone in the cup of the vales. (st. 17)

But the moment's vision of unfallen nature and the bird of love is threatened as the bird flies off with the old man pursuing (st. 18-20). Blackbirds who "die like priests" represent the fall again into the world of death and time but also the cleansing of Puritan guilt about (sexual) love from the old man (and Thomas). Stanza 21, a catalogue of words and short phrases that recapitulate the actions of the narrative so far (though not in strict chronological order), seems based on the old belief that at the moment of death a person's entire life is quickly relived. Powerful beyond any summary, the catalogue retells the old man's yearning to be free of death and time. Catching up to the she-bird at last, the old man dies: "In the far ago land the door of his death opened wide / And the bird descended." That this "door" of death is also the door of perception is made clear in the final four stanzas of the poem.

In stanzas 23-24, now that the old man has "died" into union with

the she-bird and with unfallen nature, we and the narrator are left to observe the slow, agonizing collapse from vision into habitual perception: "The dancing perished / On the white, no longer growing green" for "the rite is shorn / Of nightingale and centaur dead horse." The "springs wither / Back." Unlike ourselves, however, the old man has been transformed. In stanza 25 he is "hymned and wedded" to the "engulfing bride / The woman breasted and the heaven headed" who drowns self-consciousness if anyone ever did and who unites sexual and divine love, man and woman, the human and the natural-supernatural. In the final consummate stanza, the she-bird and the old man unite as their love reveals nature in its ultimate, Edenic form:

> . . . he was brought low,
> Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
> Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
> Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
> And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow.

Heaven is thus revealed as this world -- rightly perceived through love.

Although Tindall is generally right in seeing this poem as yet another story of "Thomas's marriage, his recovery of the past, his poetic career, the nature of poetry, and, maybe, his premonition of death"(RG 214), he does not credit Thomas enough for universalizing what may have started as another poem on the mystical power of sexuality. The best comment on the poem is by Clark Emery. Asking whether the old man really saw visionary nature, he concludes: "the man . . . rises to a higher level of perception and sees the natural process at work in its minutest particulars and its fullest scope . . . he has the armed vision . . . the miracle is visionary; when the man dies, the vision ends" (WDT 264). Other critics find distinct Romantic parallels to "A Winter's Tale." Stanford thinks the "she bird" may derive from Thomas's beloved Whitman (the "he bird" in "Out of the Cradle . . .")

while he sees the whole poem as reminiscent of Shelley's Alastor in its projection of human feelings and psychic action onto the landscape.[66] Ruth de Bedts has convincingly shown that clusters of words in "A Winter's Tale" evidence a recent, close reading of Keats's St. Agnes, an argument reinforced by both poems' juxtaposing of deeply colored images of heat and cold, white and red, etc. M. L. Rosenthal also notes significant parallels between the two poems: a winter landscape, intense images of cold and snow, a concern with sacred and profane love, and a juxtaposition of the present and the distant past of the action.[67] The thematic significance of these parallels and echoes may be indicated in Beaty's comment on Keats's poem in his study of the idea of love in Romantic poetry, the central theme also of Thomas's poem. Beaty says: "Keats more artistically bridged the gap between illusion and reality in 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' owing largely to a simple narrative and a fairy tale atmosphere. Its setting in the Middle Ages, when acceptance of otherworldliness united religion with superstition and when the terminology of worship permeated the language of love, was especially useful in providing a matrix for interweaving the natural and the supernatural."[68] Although Thomas's poem is not, I think, modelled on Keats's poem, Thomas was working in the same poetic "area" as Keats and may well have re-read St. Agnes in preparation for writing "A Winter's Tale." In any case, he certainly echoes its vocabulary and phrasing, as de Bedts shows, and in stanza 12 seems quite definitely to borrow the Keatsian minstrels and "departed village" ("Grecian Urn") and the nightingale, which here, as in the odes, are all part of a poet's concern with the reconciliation of art and nature.

The third long poem of the 1936-45 period is "Vision and Prayer" (P 180-85). If the "Ballad" and "A Winter's Tale" mark the emergence

of the landscape, described in detail, as a place for psychic projection or the object for union with the self yet also external and completely sketched, "Vision and Prayer" is the final example of the "gestation" poems of the early period and the most complete development of the figure of the child as a symbol of unity of being. Most of the later poems -- "Poem in October," "Fern Hill," the poems in In Country Sleep, and "Author's Prologue" -- are either landscape poems or poems about the poet's childhood in nature, or both.

"Vision and Prayer" contains two sections -- (i) "Vision" and (ii) "Prayer" -- of six stanzas each. In the "Vision" section, each 17-line stanza is syllabically organized by a pattern (12345678987654321) that yields a diamond or womb (open) shape; the "Prayer" section reverses the syllables (98765432123456789) to achieve a Herbertian wings or hourglass, chalice, cross, or womb (contracted) shape. Whatever symbolic significance these shapes may possess seems to be accidental. Thomas admitted to Watkins that "the second part [the "Prayer" section] is less inevitable, but I cannot alter it" (LVW 122). Recently, too, Raymond Garlick has pointed out that Thomas asked his editor at Dent to begin all the lines at the left hand margin in both sections in the second edition of Deaths and Entrances but then returned to them again for Collected Poems.[69] In addition, typographical stretching of the spaces between letters is often needed to maintain the two shapes, although in some stanzas Thomas, like Herbert, makes good use of contracting or expanding lines. I find most convincing the argument that the two patterns imitate the general ideas of openness and closure, especially of the womb during labor, for the subject this poem is the birth of a child.

In addition to the debate over the significance of the patterned

stanzas, critics sharply disagree on the subject of the poem. For those critics who wish to see Thomas as a Christian poet, this poem is their most crucial exhibit. For those who deny that Thomas is writing a Christian poem, "Vision and Prayer" is another example of Thomas's Romantic displacement of Christian ideas into a secular context. Thus, Sister Roberta Jones reads the poem as the history of the life of Christ, while Father Reddington emphasizes the poet's own experience of spiritual rebirth in Christ. A. T. Davies devotes a whole chapter of his book-long argument for Thomas's Christianity to a summary of the poem while Rushworth Kidder, investigating Thomas's debt to the Bible and Christian tradition, finds it "a fundamentally religious work."[70]

On the other hand, the non-Christian readings emphasize Thomas's use of Christian imagery to discuss nature, the self, and psychic action. E. and L. Bloom call the poem's central theme "the romantic ethos of a personally defined faith," an emphasis brought out by Faulk in her liberal identifications of the poem's "child" as "the Christ child or a christ child, or a redemptive, mystical Christ-Self."[71] Kohak and Mills both see the poem as the poet's desire to escape the burden of consciousness, while Huddlestone rightly guesses that one of the poem's concerns is the discovery that the concepts of "genesis" and "apocalypse" are primarily psychic events, a view reinforced by Fairchild's comment that Thomas "comes very close to absorbing the poetic creativity of Jesus into his own creativity as artist, prophet, and lover."[72] More certain still, Korg asserts that "the doctrines of martyrdom and redemption found in the poem function as the Christian myths usually do in Thomas: they are representations of his general pantheism . . . used to express a personal fervour."[73] Tindall, seeing this poem on the birth

of a child as the story of the creation of one of Thomas's own children (probably Aeronwy, b. 1943), of a poem, and, psychologically, of Thomas himself, finds the theme of the poem to be "the poet coming . . . from original darkness to the holy light of nature" for "nature is holy, and so are child, poem, and poet" (RG 239). Although the state of psychic unity associated with the child may be the same whose evocation is the goal of poetry, I think Tindall's too-comprehensive list of themes cannot include poetic creation (this time) except as an analogous or ancillary theme.

In my view, the poem is one of Thomas's attempts to embody the Romantic myth, which, as a displacement of the Christian myth, easily invites the use of Christian images in a personal, secular way. In the poem, the newborn child is Christ-like for every child is Christ (there is no other Christ). What the child brings to the poet's is its own ability to see nature in its unfallen, visionary form, a power that the poet at first runs away from out of fear and out of the habit of a gloomy accommodation of the self to fallen nature but a power which he finally accepts as a way of seeing nature as divine, sacramental. Thus, the child is father of the man, for the child's spontaneous exercise of imaginative vision is transferred to the poet. In this sense, as Tindall argues, the child performs naturally what the poet does by craft: it reveals the divinity in nature that links nature to man and brings to the man that higher perception of nature in its Edenic form that man's "fall" into self-consciousness and psychic division hitherto prevented him from seeing.

The "Vision" section (st. 1-6): the poet addresses the child as it is born, confessing his desire to be one with the child who is able to make the poet see fallen nature rise up to its unfallen Edenic form.

Stanza 1: waiting in an adjacent "room" the poet hears the opening womb whose "wren's bone" thin wall is separating the poet from that child who will be born now without any baptism but that of the "dark," that is, the world of time and death into which the child falls from the womb where total psychic and physical unity is "heaven." A "room" in Thomas is often the head, thus the "room" of womb and the poet's own "next room" are adjacent "psyches," one, the child's, unified, and the other, the poet's, darkly estranged in adult self-consciousness. That there is "no baptism / But dark" seems to refute Christian interpretations, as do the question and answer that frame the stanza:

> Who
> Are you . . .
> . . . . . .
> The wild
> Child.

Hardly Christ, the child is the "wild" child of nature and imagination. Stanza 2: hearing the mother in labor, the poet in the "next room" sees the child's womb-exiting, blood-red head as a sign of the "crucifixion" of all incarnation, a forewarning of death, yet the birth is also miraculous and the "dark" of the world is pushed back by the child's exiting "light." Stanzas 3-4: newly born, the child's perception of the world is Edenic -- "the first dawn" of his "kingdom come" whose "lightnings of adoration" (the poet's adoration of the child) have driven back the poet's "black silence" that, now approaching identity with the child, becomes the "dumbfounding haven" beyond necessary speech. An illumination of dark, fallen nature, the child "with a bonfire in / His mouth" still in state on the "man drenched throne" of the heaven-womb, reveals nature as a correspondent order to his own being, the "spin / Of the sun" matched by "the spuming / Cyclone of his wing." The "stream" of lightning pouring from the heavenly womb as throne makes the womb a New

Jersusalem and the child a fulfiller of revelation. The "high noon / Of his wound" is the child's sacrificial suffering of birth-as-crucifixion so that his own imaginative perception of nature, though destined like the poet's to be lost in his own adulthood, will, nevertheless, in its brief period of existence, redeem the poet by renewing the poet's own perceptions which are then transferred to his poems. Stanzas 5-6: having identified himself with the child and the child's perceptions, the poet witnesses the transformation of the illusion of fallen nature into the reality of unfallen nature. By having

> crouched bare
> In the sluice
> Of his / the child's / blazing breast

the poet will "waken" out of the dark fall into self-consciousness and into a vision of Eden. As in "This Side of the Truth" so here one cause of man's seeing nature as fallen is his penchant for moral judgment. Thus it is a "judge blown bedlam" of the "sea bottom" of nature that follows the child by "upsailing / With his flame." Nature begins a "spiral of ascension" from its present form ("the vultured urn") to its Edenic form ("the morning / Of man"). Like a child, Edenic nature is new-born ("The / Born sea") and is a place where man achieves unity of being:

> The finding one
> And upright Adam
> Sang upon origin.

This psychic regeneration of the poet is specifically attributed to this child, who cannot be the unique Christ child for the poet praises all the redeeming children who aid in our regaining a vision of unfallen nature: "O the wings of children!" The children's "woundward flight" is their womb-wound exiting into the wounding crucifixion of incarnation. Doomed to "die" in fact and into adulthood, these children are called soldiers who unite man and sky, saints who become one with their visions.

Having seen nature return to its original form -- "the world winding home" -- the poet escapes self-consciousness and "dies" into the vision, like the old man in "A Winter's Tale."

The "Prayer" section (st. 7-12): having had cleansed his own doors of perception, the poet retreats from the burden of visionary experience, and, as priestly mediator between the child's vision and all the fallen humans who are estranged from nature's Edenic form, the poet calls on the child to go back into the womb so that the fallen may return to their accustomed, stoic existence in a world perceived by reason. Foiled, however, by his truer, deeper impulses, the poet, in stanza 6, was overcome by the child's vision of nature as divine. Stanzas 7-9: praying to the child "in the name of the lost," the poet speaks for "that lamenting / Brethren" whose recalcitrant attitude toward rising up into Edenic consciousness is symbolized by the "birds of burden" whose duty is to try to transform our vision of nature by raising up the "green dust" and spiritual

> ghost
> From
> The ground

That are the residue of Eden in our fallen world. Having seen Eden in stanzas 5-6, the poet says "I belong / Not wholly" to the company of the lost. Thus, as in poems like "A Refusal to Mourn" and "Ceremony," Thomas continues to perform the role of a celebratory mediator, intercessor, priest, fatherly advisor, who stands between symbols of achieved unity of being and despairing isolation or death. As intercessor for the lost, he asks the child to return to the womb, for the child's Edenic consciousness tortures the fallen. The child "learns now the sun and moon / Of his mother's milk," an image linking the cosmos to the mother's breast, making nature a maternal figure whose heavenly bodies are milky ways, and which,

in its unfallen form, may enjoy simultaneously both sun and moon, beyond time. The fallen, however, apparently terrified by the possibility of joy, prefer "the unchristened mountain," like an earth that is untransformed by the redeeming child's baptizing vision. Let none of these who live in the "night forever falling" be "awake" to the child, the poet says, to "the shrine of his world's wound / And the blood drop's garden." That is, the Romantic child's redeeming crucifixion and Agony in the Garden are his "world" of visionary nature and the Eden of the blood that unites him with that world; for it is the self/world relationship that the child offers which these displaced Christian events symbolize. Stanzas 10-11: explaining why the lost prefer not to enter the child's Edenic vision, the poet says that they fear the loss of the security of the world of habitual perception, which, though dark, has been their own. This world seems to be that perceived by reason: "a known / Star and country," "the interpreted evening," and the "known dark of the earth." As their "common lazurus" who suffers the agony of rebirth, the poet seems to say quite clearly that the lost, fallen state of man is not a result of moral transgression but a psychic event: "For the country of death is the heart's size / And the star of the lost the shape of the eyes." He prays bitterly in the name of the (Christian?) God who is only a fable --

> in the name
> Of no one
> Now or
> No
> One to
> Be

-- that rather than the fallen rising up into the child's vision the child should fall into dark. Thus, the sacramentally "Crimson / Sun" would "spin a grave grey / And the colour of clay" around the child who

would grey into adulthood, the loss of vision, and death. Stanza 12: the poet's prayer to be spared the child's vision is not granted. Rather, the Romantic child and the sun are united in a wonderful image of divinity in nature, and the poet enters the child's vision of the world:

> the loud sun
> Christens down
> The sky.
> I
> Am found.

Asking to be seared and drowned in the "world's wound" of the child, the poet and child become one: "My voice burns in his hand." Now "lost in the blinding / One" of child and nature, the poet perceives unfallen nature triumphant: "the sun roared at the prayer's end." By just "barely," one might say, displacing Christian myth into the psychological categories of the Romantic myth, Thomas "draws over" a maximum amount of the power of traditional associations while at the same time making it explicitly clear, as I have tried to show, that the poem is outside Christian orthodoxy but inside the categories of Romantic experience.

Poems of Childhood in Nature (1944-45): "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill." In Deaths and Entrances, two ode-like poems whose subjects are the poet's imaginative recollection of his childhood in nature forecast the dominant pastoral concerns of his final volume of new poems, In Country Sleep (1952), the subject of Chapter VI. Although "Fern Hill" is Thomas's best known and most widely anthologized poem, "Poem in October" is, to my mind, an equally wide-ranging poem emotionally, undoubtedly as good as Thomas's best, as Stephen Spender thought, and as Thomas himself may have thought when he told Donald Hall on one of his American tours that of all those he had written his three "good poems" were "Poem in October," "Poem on his Birthday," and "This Bread I Break," a list from which "Fern Hill" is noticeably absent.[74]

"Poem in October" (P 176-78) is listed by Watkins (AST xiii) as among those poems that Thomas wrote after the horror of living through wartime London "compelled his imagination forward . . . to the beautiful poems evoking childhood." What is significant about "Poem in October" is that it is Thomas's first acknowledged "place poem," a poem set in a particularized landscape. Speaking of the poem in a letter to Watkins, Thomas is very conscious of this fact: "I've just finished two poems," he writes, "Vision and Prayer" being one, and "the other . . . a Laugharne poem: the first place poem I've written" (LVW 114: my italics). Watkins says that Thomas contemplated this poem for three years (1941-44), the first line having to be changed from "my twenty-seventh year" to "my thirtieth year" when it was finally completed in 1944. Written at Blaen Cwm, a Welsh village where Thomas had written poems in childhood and adolescence, and mailed to Watkins from Llangain, another small Welsh village to which his parents had retired and which was near his childhood nature places, Fernhill and Ann Jones' farm (Ferris 82), "Poem in October" is set both in the seaside village of Laugharne and on Sir John's Hill, whose greenwooded shouldering cliffs protrude into the neighboring estuary on which Thomas's seaside house was situated.[75]

For those who have been to Laugharne or who are familiar with Thomas's landscape poems of 1947-52, the particular landscape in "Poem in October" is unmistakable. Beginning in the town (st. 1-2), the poet climbs Sr. John's Hill (st. 3-4), and there undergoes a transformation as he regains his own childhood sense of wonder in nature (st. 5-7). Identifying the occasion as his thirtieth birthday, Thomas sets the poem in a definite place (Laugharne, Sir John's Hill) and time (1944), thus making "Poem in October" a striking example of Abrams' definition of the greater Romantic lyric. Beginning with a description of the

landscape in the present by the poet as an adult (st. 1-5), he then vividly recalls the same landscape as seen so differently by himself as a child (st. 5, 6, and st. 7, ll. 1-4), and he ends by returning to his adult self in the present landscape (st. 7, ll. 5-10) where his exclamation of hope for the future represents the rejuvenating power of visionary memory. This present/past/present-future structure dramatizing the differences between the adult and the child's envisionings of a particularized landscape fits well into Abrams' definition: "the major lyric innovation of the Romantic period . . . the extended poems of description and meditation are in fact fragments of reshaped autobiography, in which the poet confronts a particular stage of his life, in a colloquy that specifies the present, evokes the past, and anticipates the future, and thereby defines and evaluates what it means to have suffered and to grow older."[76]

Although not specifically identifying "Poem in October" as a greater Romantic lyric, critics have readily seen the direct debt of this particular poem to Romantic tradition. Stanley Friedman has pointed out significant parallels between Thomas's poem and Whitman's "There was a child went forth."[77] In his study of Thomas's several poems concerning his own birthday, Oliver Evans has remarked that in "Poem in October" as "in Wordsworth's 'Intimations' Ode, it is true that joy is harder of achievement for the adult than for the child, but the adult can still experience it, if only as recollection." Similarly, of the poet's climbing Sir John's Hill on whose top he experiences a return to childhood vision, Evans remarks: "it is typical of Thomas's romanticism (as it is of Wordsworth's) that he ascends to his childhood, a summit of happy innocence which he can now attain only in his imagination."[78] Walford Davies also emphasizes the

poem's deep indebtedness to Romantic tradition. In general, he finds that "its reflection of man's moods in the world of nature is obviously in a long and major tradition of English lyric poetry, bringing Wordsworth especially to mind." Even Roy Fuller, who despises Thomas, called the poem "dilute Wordsworthianism."[79] More specifically, Davies analyzes the poem as a display of "the ability of memory (of childhood) to transform and transcend merely external weather. The difference is drawn between external delight . . . and inward vision, between fancy . . . and real imagination" (SP 123). Finally, Jacob Korg comes as close as anyone to defining the distinctly Romantic form of Thomas's poem. Korg comments that "'Poem in October' is, in fact, essentially a recapitulation of 'Tintern Abbey.' Through an experience with a familiar landscape, the mature man secures a momentary access to the lost imaginative poems of childhood, and what he remembers infiltrates the present moment with a joyful though obscure sense of order."[80] Written in seven 10-syllable lines, the only slightly varying syllabics basically (9/12/9/3/5/12/12/5/3/9) reinforced by superbly orchestrated assonance, "Poem in October" is, in form and style, the first of Thomas's later, ode-like, open-worked poems whose greatly varying line lengths and freely flowing cadences convey a sense of joy, freedom, and lucidity in image and statement in striking contrast to the gnarled, densely packed, heavily stressed pentameter stanzas of the early poems.

Stanzas 1-4 (the present): on his thirtieth birthday in October, 1944, the poet awakens in Laugharne, leaves the town, and climbs Sir John's Hill among all the sights and sounds of nature. Several contrasts emerge in the opening section of the poem: the town below/the hill above, rain/sun, autumn/spring or summer. All of these pairs lead up to the explicit transformation of the adult poet into his lost childhood

self in the second (the past) section of the poem (st. 5,6, and st. 7, ll. 1-4). The town, symbol of adult consciousness and separation from childhood spontaneity in nature, is "sleeping" as the poet "woke" to his birthday that is a prelude to a higher awakening into childhood. As he leaves the town for the hill, he crosses an obscure but real "border" between two existences:

> I took the road
> Over the border
> And the gates
> Of the town closed as the town awoke.

Locked in "present" consciousness, the town is left below. Upon the hill, the poet, as Walford Davies shrewdly noted (SP 123), experiences a freak of nature: sunshine on the hill but clouds, mist, and rain below the hill but over the town. A brilliant and entirely unforced symbol of childhood's ascension over adulthood's estrangement from spontaneous joy in nature, this external phenomenon now links the town/hill to the rain/sun contrast. From the vantage point of the hill, the poet looks down on the "dwindling harbour," and even more significantly, on

> the sea wet church the size of a snail
> With its horns through mist and the castle
> Brown as owls.

As Kidder notes, this description, from a hilltop perspective, of the church seems a wry commentary on orthodox religion as slow, shell-encased, bemisted (and possibly satanic -- the horns?), although the tone of the poem as a whole is so unremittingly wistful that the church may be a less radical version of Thomas's beloved sunken cathedral image, here drowned in mist and more a part of nature (a snail) than a symbol of orthodox rigidity.[81] Similarly, medieval Laugharne castle is seen as a part of nature (owls) yet as birds of wisdom owls may portend the onset of adult self-consciousness associated with the town. Beginning,

in any case, in "rainy autumn" and a "shower of all my days," the poet climbs hillward into sun and summer:

> the sun of October
> Summery
> On the hill's shoulder.

On the hill, the poet encountered "fond climates" and he

> wandered and listened
> To the rain wringing
> Wind blow cold
> In the wood faraway under me.

Now "beyond the border" of adulthood, he enters "the gardens / Of spring and summer" on the sunny October hill where a "springful of larks" is strangely present in autumn. In fact, birds of all kinds (as well as water of all sorts) pervade the poem as symbols of divinity in nature and childhood joy. A perfect description of Laugharne's herons bent over on one leg in the shoals, Thomas's famous image of "the heron / Priested shore" is in this poem, as well as "water praying" like a congregation, completing the image of sacramentalism in nature. The poet's words and nature's things are one, for summer and spring are "blooming in the tall tales" of remembered childhood while, as a birthday present it seems, "the birds of the winged trees /were/ flying my name" against the sky. There is a Keatsian fullness in nature: the "neighbour wood" welcomes the poet, a "high tide" of water and welling up recollections of childhood are made by the "bushes brimming with whistling / Blackbirds." As Davies notes (SP 123), stanzas 1-5 present a benevolent nature but the thirty year old poet's response, though affirmative, is less spontaneous and imaginative than it was in his childhood.[82] The birds are "sweet" and the hilltop is a "fond climate," but, we are told in stanza 5, there is a deeper response in store. At peace with himself on Sir John's Hill, the poet says:

There could I marvel
My birthday
Away but the weather turned around.

As so often seen before in the early poems, "weather" in Thomas means inner and outer weather and their correspondences. October autumn and its rain falling on the town below has given way, as the poet climbs the hill, to summer and sun: thus, Thomas now directly says, did outer weather correspond to inner weather, the adult's imminent ascension into his own lost childhood.

Stanzas 5, 6, and 7, ll. 1-4 (the past): in a long evocation description, the adult regains his childhood's spontaneous apprehension of nature as ordered, benevolent, divine. Moving from adult "fancy" to childhood "imagination," Thomas quite clearly indicates the differences in intensity of perception. The merely "blithe country" perceived by the adult (cf. "fond climates") is left behind to turn down "the other air" and "the blue altered sky" of imaginative perception (also, altered = altared). Not merely a "marvel," now it is a "wonder of summer" with its apples, pears, currents, and the poet is possessed by familiar imagination:

And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels (my italics; green chapels = woods)

A spot of time or epiphanic moment, the adult poet perceives fully once again nature as divine, its own decipherable language. The poet now fully possesses his own childhood, "the twice told fields of infancy" because once lived and a second time recollected, and, in one of Thomas's simplest and most moving lines, he says of his recovered childhood self: "his tears burned my cheek and his heart moved in mine." Now, he sees,

"these were the woods" where the child who "whispered the truth of his joy" to trees, stones, fish, actually lived, and having recollected this, the poet, in the present, is privileged to apprehend directly once again, for a precious moment, what he saw continuously as a child:

> And the mystery
> Sang alive
> Still in the water and singingbirds.

Priestly heron and praying water still are holy. In the final moment of epiphany, the poet, conscious now of inner "weather" and its turnings, feels within that

> true
> Joy of the long dead child sang burning
> In the sun.

Stanza 7, ll. 5-10 (the present and the future): Abrams says that the third section of the greater lyric "anticipates the future." Thus, in the short third section of Thomas's poem, the poet ends the long vision of childhood briefly and simply:

> O may my heart's truth
> Still be sung
> On this high hill in a year's turning.

Though the "town below lay leaved in October blood" of reddened, fallen leaves, the poet "stood there in the summer noon" of hilltop and childhood, knowing he must again descend to the town until his next birthday. It was on this high hill of the joyful Romantic child and his heightened consciousness that Thomas wished to stay, in spontaneous communion with divinity in nature. "Poem in October," however, stands almost alone in its nearly unadulterated joy and affirmation -- possibly the reason it reflects more than any other poem the exact form of the greater Romantic lyric. In "Fern Hill" and in the landscape poems of In Country Sleep, the child's landscape vision is more distinctly threatened by a variety of enemies -- time, death, the "Thief," Puritanism, atomic war.

"Fern Hill" (P 195-96), the final poem in Deaths and Entrances (1946) and the last poem for consideration in this chapter, represents a peak in Thomas's development, just as Altarwise by Owl-light, the last poem in Twenty-Five Poems (1936) and the final poem considered in Chapter IV, represented a culmination of the tendencies in the earlier poems. Therefore, as with the Altarwise sonnets, I shall not attempt to review all the critical perspectives on this poem, of which there are multitudes; rather, I shall limit my analysis to what I see as the central structuring principle of the poem, the Romantic juxtaposition of childhood and adult perceptions of nature. What I shall try to show is that the common critical view that "Fern Hill" is an exclusive presentation of the child's vision of nature seems in error. What the poem really does is to superimpose the adult's less visionary view of nature on top of the child's by various devices from irony and ambiguity to direct statement, progressive clusters of images, and several parallel syntactical structures that contain these images. In the end, "Fern Hill" should emerge as an example of the Romantic concern with the growth of a poet's mind, for we see the "fall" of the child's spontaneous perception of visionary nature as it is growing into that of adolescence with its sexual awakening and adulthood with its consciousness of estrangement, death, and time. Against this dismal flow, however, emerges implicitly a faith in imagination and memory, the faculties of mind that are able to recover, embody, and thus evoke forever in us the lost childhood vision.

"Fern Hill" largely embodies the first two phases of the Romantic myth -- creation and fall -- but the final phase -- redemption -- is implicit in the very fact of the existence of "Fern Hill" itself, a poem that contains the child's and the adult's perceptions of nature

and that is thus the product of a sensibility larger than both in order to know the defining limtis of the consciousnesses it dramatically opposes. This larger sensibility is the creation of poetic imagination, evidenced not only by the mere existence of the poem "Fern Hill" but by the poem's final line, which, among other things, presents a picture of the poet making poems enclosed in the "chains" of rhythm and rhyme, the "sea" of nature, and the poet's own psyche governed by the "moon that is always rising," that is, the power of poetic imagination, a power natural and implicit in the child but fully developed and active in the adult who needs to make the poem in order to re-enter the sense of undivided unity enjoyed by the child. (After all, even Thomas's detractors who see "Fern Hill" as corruptingly nostalgic must admit that no child, and few adults, would be capable of writing this poem itself). In the end, one may come to see that although time governs the doomed child in the poem, poetic memory governs time, and imagination governs memory.

In one respect a rather calculated inquiry into the nature and limitations of the Romantic child of nature whose epiphanic re-emergence was the central action of "Poem in October," this poem, "Fern Hill," prepares us for the final phase of Thomas's career, the poems of In Country Sleep, several elegiac poems, and "Author's Prologue," all of which deal with the failure or triumph of imagination as it confronts the landscape, and, in doing so, moves tentatively toward an autonomy entirely free from time and "fallen" consciousness. This autonomy is what Thomas is his prose paraphase of the superstructure of the unfinished In Country Heaven called the realization of "memory, in all tenses, /that/ can look towards the future, can caution and admonish" (QEOM 157). A version of Keats's negative capability, this final form of imaginative power makes it so that "the rememberer may live himself

back into active participation in the remembered scene, adventure, or spiritual condition" (QEOM 157). "Fern Hill," then, far from being the culminating poem of Thomas's career, is in many ways a transitional poem between "Poem in October," a greater Romantic lyric that accepts the loss of childhood vision that can only be realized for a brief moment annually on one's birthday, to the three unfinished poems and one fragment of In Country Heaven, in which Thomas hoped to free "memory in all its tenses" (which is imagination) from the very "time" that splits perception into categories of "child" or "adult."

Unfortunately, little commentary by Thomas himself exists on "Fern Hill"; however, our knowledge of the actual place on which the poem was based gives some insight into the degree to which Thomas recovered the child's vision of what an adult would have seen as a slightly seedy, small Welsh farm. Located near Laugharne, the place Fernhill (sic) was near the old family house in Llangain and was the home of Ann Jones, Thomas's aunt, about whose death from uterine cancer he wrote, as an adolescent, the self-postering letter of cruel detachment to Miss Johnson, but whose death in 1933 meant a great deal to Thomas, including an end to his visits to Fernhill, as indicated in the differences between the coldly satirical portrait of her funeral in the first version of "After the Funeral" whose revised version (1938) marks the emergence of the Welsh landscape, love as a power released by imagination, and the poet as priestly intermediary between holy nature and various "congregations" that characterize the later poems. FitzGibbon (Life 29-34) notes that Fernhill (country) and Cwmdonkin Park (city) were the two particular landscapes that evoked Thomas's feelings about nature in many of his poems. Both places, he notes, are on hills, running down to water, a stream (Fernhill) or the sea (the park). That Fernhill is also "Fern

Hill" is confirmed by FitzGibbon and many others who note that the barns, the hayfields, the orchard (now in ruins), and the stream of the poem are all at the place Fernhill, in much the same way and place as they are described in the poem. Sinclair notes that the trees in the poem and on the place are "the survivors of that Milk Wood which used to cover nearly all of ancient Wales," a primeval forest of "ferns" that lends greater significance to the title of the poem.[83] FitzGibbon feels that the significance of the Fernhill landscape to Thomas cannot easily be exaggerated: "Dylan in later years looked back on his innocent childhood with longing and delight, and Fernhill was at least as much a part of his lost Garden of Eden as was Cwmdonkin Park, indeed almost certainly more" (Life 34). This view is further confirmed by Paul Ferris who discovered part of a poem fragment on Fernhill written very near the poet's death: "a place with which I have come to associate all the summer of chil . . . a lovely farm -- a lonely farm -- and a place with which I have come to associate all the golden -- never shone a sun like that old rolling . . ." (Ferris 45). But Thomas's idealization of Fernhill is equally obvious. Fernhill was once inhabited by a notorious hangman who was a famous drunkard and who eventually hanged himself on the place.

It was also the scene of the hypocritical funeral and mourners described in both versions of "After the Funeral," and by Thomas's manhood the place had fallen into decay. Thus, John Malcolm Brinnin tells in Dylan Thomas in America of a visit he and Thomas made to Fernhill in 1953. Brinnin records: "It all seemed much smaller and emptier than he remembered, Dylan said, and I could see that he was becoming nostalgic and unhappily thoughtful in this pilgrimage to a house memory and imagination had furnished so differently" (DTA 240). To this scene may

be added Thomas's own more realistic description of Fernhill in his short story "The Peaches" (PA 2-16). There, his boyhood sense of unity with nature--"on my haunches, eager and alone . . . I felt all my young body like an excited animal surrounding me . . . in the exact middle of a living story" (PA 12) -- is contrasted with his uncle's drunkenness, his young preacher cousin's masturbation, and the following description of Fernhill and the farm: "the ramshackle outhouses had tumbling, rotten roofs, jagged holes in their sides, broken shutters, and peeling white-wash; rusty screens ripped out from the dangling crooked boards" (PA 6). There are no outhouses in "Fern Hill." Obviously, then, Thomas, in the poem, is in part presenting the external world, the particular landscape, as seen from the inner perspective of the child, and thus the landscape appears to be idealized, the way it seemed to him as a child. Apparently, Thomas thought "Fern Hill" an important poem, for he rushed it into the printers to become the final poem in Deaths and Entrances. In 1949, in a despairing mood when no poems were being done, he wrote to the Princess Caetani, an art patroness: "I am glad you like Fern Hill best of all my poems to date. I also used to like it, & I think it was among the, say, half dozen of mine which came nearest to what I had in heart and mind and muscle when I first wished to write them" (SL 338). Besides this remark, about all we know is that Thomas showed Brinnin over 200 worksheets for the poem and commented that the poem had at least one inexcusably bad line -- "I ran my heedless ways" -- of which Thomas said, "that's bloody bad" (DTA 132-34).

Among the numerous commentaries on "Fern Hill," several critics have stressed the child/adult division in perception that creates two landscapes or two views of a single landscape in the poem. Only three, however, Walford Davies, T. H. Jones, and Alastair Fowler, on whose

remarks I shall build, have commented in detail on the implicit subject-object or self-world relation as the central structuring principle of the poem. Many critics have paired "Fern Hill" with "Tintern Abbey," distinguishing, however, Thomas's dramatic re-creation of the child's view of nature, a view which Wordsworth is more content to philosophize upon than to evoke intensely. Critics of Romantic poetry have made comments on Wordsworth's poem that may help us approach "Fern Hill." Kroeber's remark that in "Tintern Abbey" the poet distinguishes the child's spontaneous, unconscious love of nature from the poet's awareness of loving nature fits Thomas's poem as well. Similarly applicable is Hartman's commentary that "In 'Tintern Abbey' or 'X Revisited' the poet looks back at a transcended stage and comes to grip with the fact of self-alienation." Most importantly of all, M. H. Abrams, citing Wordsworth himself, touches upon the center of Thomas's poem: "'Tintern Abbey'," he says, "also inaugurated the wonderful functional device Wordsworth called the 'two consciousnesses': a scene is revisited, and the remembered landscape . . . is superimposed on the picture before the eye; the two landscapes fail to match, and so set a problem . . . which compels the meditation."[84] Reversing this procedure to achieve a similar end, Thomas presents the child's landscape first, while the adult's landscape intrudes gradually, by ambiguous image or direct statement, into the child's world. The "two consciousnesses" however, as in "Poem in October," "This Side of the Truth," and the prose piece "Conversation at Christmas" (Small Boy vs. Self) are also the central concern of "Fern Hill." Among Thomas's own critics, Cox, Ochshorn, and Crewe all emphasize the intrusion, as Ochshorn puts it, of the "long night of adulthood" into the child's world, although Cox sees the adult's view as the more valid one. Crewe notes that for the

child "there is no subjective and objective" as there is for the adult, for the child's "world" exists simultaneously within and beyond his own mind.[85] M. L. Rosenthal sees "Fern Hill" as conclusively defining Thomas in "his essential character as a modern Romantic" in that poem's intermixture of the lost childhood vision with "an ever more piercing adult sadness." Also seeing "Fern Hill" as a Romantic poem, Walford Davies writes with less melancholy than Rosenthal that Thomas is purposely faithful to "two psychologies at once: that of the child and that of the grown man, that of innocence and that of experience." Commenting on the poem's use of sacramental language to describe the child's vision, Davies concludes: "What Thomas has stressed there is the harmonious unity (not just the unsuspectingness) of the child's vision of the world. And the poem's point, as I see it, is not simply to lament its passing, but to understand that, having been, it remains a measuring experience of the value of the created world."[86] My analysis is the tracing out of the developing interplay between the "two consciousnesses" or, in Davies' words, the "two psychologies" that are the dramatis personae of the psychodrama "Fern Hill."

Beginning with the title, we note that this poem will likely be a description of a particular landscape, that of Fernhill. As in "Poem in October" which was set in part on Sir John's Hill, this poem associates the child's view of nature with the hilltop as a place of ascension; similarly, the adult view of nature is associated with the lower sea, in the last two lines of the poem. An ancient, primeval plant, a "fern" links the child to man's ancestral past as a part of nature, prior to the fall into consciousness.[87] Also, as a common Welsh house plant, it reinforces the Welshness of the landscape, and of course it is the actual name of an actual place where as a child Thomas visited his aunt on holiday.

Stanza 1: composed in lines strictly syllabic and with assonantal rhyme (14/14/9/6/9/15/14/7/9; abcddabcd; only slightly varied in later stanzas), this stanza is the first of three which describe the cycle of a single day at Fernhill from night to day to night. Following thus the pattern of creation in Genesis 1:5 ("And the evening and the morning were the first day"), these stanzas present all the child's days at Fernhill as a single, sacramental day, enclosed by a night that only completes the day and is unthreatening. Told by the poet as an adult, there is from the very first line a contrast of the "two consciousnesses" and the twin landscapes they perceive, but though present, the adult's view lurks more often only in certain disturbing ambiguities than in direct statement. More often, a highly energized, intense re-creation of the child's subjective perception of the landscape is the focus of attention. The child's perspective is evoked by various devices that begin in stanza 1 but which continue throughout the poem: a simple, highly colored, concrete vocabulary; a high occurrence (over 30) of the child's connector "and" that shows all things as simply and fluidly related; a tendency to fuse the literal and the metaphorical; a transference of the child's feelings to external objects which are thus humanized; the use of the "twisted cliche" whose commonplace yet original nature suits the poet as child; and the tendency to fuse abstract and concrete experiences. In addition, patterns of syntax and image that will continue in the poem begin here. These include the as I was __ and __ __ construction (= monosyllabic adjectives in the first, second cases; disyllabic in the third), the use of "about" as preposition with two possible objects, the introduction of "Time" as a personification, and the beginning of the "green" and "gold" imagery.[88]

Lines 1-3: an introductory description of Fernhill. In line 1,

the first two key words are "Now" and "was": the word "now," not only a fairytale's first word but the word that sums up the immediacy and spontaneity of the child's experience, contrasts the adult's "was," the definite setting of the poem in a lost past. The word "as" in lines 1 and 2 is the first instance of intentional ambiguity that, by implicitly containing the adult's perspective, creates the "overlapping" landscape. Meaning both "since" to the child and "as long as" to the adult, the word allows the adult's knowledge of the limited years of childhood to undercut slightly the child's view that his own state of being "young and easy" demands a correspondingly similar external world. The child's transference of subjective response to external objects is present throughout: the "lilting house," though possibly full of singing Welsh relations, probably reflects the child's own "lilting" or rhythmic swing in tune with the external. Also meaning to lift up one's voice to sound the alarm (OED), the adult's view may lurk here too. Being "happy as the grass was green," the child's intensity of feeling is matched by the intensity of color in nature; but green grass turns yellow and a man's days are as grass (Psalms 103), so that the child's identity of an internal state of feeling with an external object is undercut ever so slightly, not in tone, but in the logical implication of the conditional comparison (which one tends to miss on first reading, as Thomas probably intended). The position of "about" in line 2 allows it to modify "I" and "apple boughs" in line 1, linking thus child and nature not only syntactically but in the circling motion imitated by enjambment and the evoked picture of a child and apple trees swirling around the house (another case of the child's subjective response governing the landscape). The apples seem harmless here, Hesperidian if anything, elevated on "boughs" rather than on the more prosaic "branches,"

but they also contain reference to the Tree of Knowledge which the child is blessedly "under" for now, too small to pluck that fruit. Like apples, greenness is essentially affirmative -- youthful, growing -- yet its potential meanings -- naive, gangreen, untested -- exist in remission to be developed later in the poem. Line 3 has puzzled some critics who assume that lines 1-2 occur in daylight and who thus see the reference to night as intrusive. Fowler reads the poem as starting with night, but few children would be playing outside during the dark.[89] I think that Thomas is presenting in the introductory clauses and phrases of 1-3, a short, complete description of day/night cycle at Fernhill, and thus stanzas 1-3 contain not one but two such cycles, the first brief, the second enlarged upon. As with "about" in line 3, "starry" as a delayed epithet modifies both "night" and "dingle" (its dew twinkling from starlight) to create a cosmos of two concave sections that match starrily (to the child). A dingle, a dell or hollow wooded and with many flowers, is thus "starry" in another sense with flowers and shadowy trees as the blue night is filled with flowering stars.

Lines 4-5: the deity of the child's world is time, a strange personification for Thomas, which governs the child, not, as some critics think, as an enemy, but as a benevolent king, clearly associated with the sun, both of whom bestow and then take away childhood. Saying that time let the child "hail and climb / Golden in the heydays of his eyes," Thomas, as Davies noticed, fuses an abstraction, "time," with a concrete image of the boy catching a ride on a hay wagon (in line 6 he is "honoured among wagons").[90] Naturally imaginative, the child does not distinguish abstract and concrete in perception. He may climb into time's eye just as easily as he transfers his joy to house and grass. Lines 6-9: presenting a picture that to the child is literally true, to the

adult only figuratively so, Thomas tells us that the child lived "once below a time," a twisted cliche from a fairytale opening that parallels "under" in line 1 in placing childhood psychically "below" the heightened self-consciousness of (in another hidden pun?) of grown-ups. Human order in society and natural order are interchangeable to the child: the apples in the trees are "towns" which the child governs as a "prince," subjective desire dominating that which is external to it. More emphatically, the child, we are told, "lordly had" the apple trees and leaves "trail with daisies and barley / Down the rivers of the windfall light." Desire again governs and orders the object in an image that has caused some critical disagreement. Is the child in the trees swinging from branches that "trail" in the low growing daisies and barley? The phrase "windfall light" suggests good fortune, early fallen fruit (green apples), fallen fruit as golden as light (golden apples), or light filtered through leaves onto the ground as if fallen from the tree. Fallen light suggests a tree of light, a world tree, whose flowing rivers of light are nature in its visionary form. If he is still riding in a hay wagon full of barley and decorated with daisies, this may be a picture of apple trees streaming by the child on either side (another image of subject perception). My guess is that the image is an extension of the monarchical image. As prince (time is king), the child has subjects, the apples in the towns. Making a "progress" or processional through these towns, he makes the apple-laden branches into "noble" retainers, investing them with robes whose trains "trail" behind them, made of daisies (day's eyes, opening at dawn and closing at night like a child's eyes) and barley (the stuff of malt liquor, for celebrating the prince's arrival). Thus, the princely child creates order, rank, value in the landscape he rules.

Stanza 2: having looked rather closely at stanza 1, we can see in

stanza 2 repetitions and variations of certain syntactical and imagistic patterns. A wider view of the same landscape as in stanza 1, stanza 2 replaces "young and easy" with "green and carefree" in its opening line; more likely to mean inexperienced as well as verdant, "green" is joined by the more ominous "carefree" whose "care," though absent in the child, is present in the adult who will later say twice (st. 5,6) that as a child "nothing I cared." The preposition "among" that placed the child amid wagons now surrounds him with barns, for the child's self is the center of his world. The preposition "about," similarly placed in stanza 1, takes both the child and the barns as its referent, linking the child and the external in a fluid, borderless process of perception. The sinister "as" in line 1, but especially in line 2, could mean as long as/as if/ because depending on whether it is the child's or the adult's landscape that we are observing. As a boy, Thomas visited the farm but it was not his real home, a fact probably echoed here as well. As in stanza 1, lines 4-5 here begin with "Time" and "Golden" suggesting childhood is the "golden time," an idea reinforced by line 6 where the child, all green in stanza 1, is now "green and golden," words still essentially affirmative but with overtones of naivete and the autumnal. It is fascinating that Frye in Anatomy of Criticism says that in stories of "the innocent youth of the hero . . . the story of Adam and Eve before the Fall" that that Arcadia or Eden's "heraldic colors are green and gold, traditionally the colors of vanishing youth."[91] Still transferring his feelings to the external, the child plays in the "happy yard" and, no longer prince but a "huntsman and herdsman," the child says that "cows sang to my horn" and the foxes answered him just as he himself is "singing" on the farm. Is the child's fall in rank from prince to herdsman indicative of his inevitable fall into adulthood, or does he,

like Whitman's cosmic "I" identify himself with various people and things outside himself? The adult poet intrudes to say that as a child he played in the sun "that is young once only," a fact that the child would not know. The line break at lines 4-5 accommodates several meanings hinging on "let me . . . be / Golden." Time, now a benevolent deity showing "mercy," let the child exist, let him alone, and allowed him to become golden, a completely realized thing of greatest value -- himself. In the closing description of sacramental nature, Thomas's often used device of displacing religious language into secular experience occurs again: "And the sabbath rang slowly / In the pebbles of the holy streams." The child's subjective view of time as unhastening is indicated by "slowly" while the "holy streams" match the streaming windfall light of stanza 1. If stanza 1 ends with a royal progress, stanza 2 forecasts a religious ceremony, a mass. Both "river" (st. 1) and "streams" (st. 2) also tell us how objects in the outer world <u>flow</u> past the fast running child.

Stanza 3: taking the child to night and sleep, this stanza ends the first half of the poem and is almost entirely devoted to presenting the <u>external</u> world as a function of the child's sensibility and perception. Lines 1-4: not dealing with time in abstract terms, the child judges it naturally, by watching the movement of heavenly bodies; thus he plays "all the sun long" and sleeps "all the moon long" (l. 7). Being small, he measures all else by his own dimensions and finds the hayfields to be "high as the house," as if they towered into the sky. All the elements cluster in these lines -- "air," "watery," "fire," and "grass" -- for stanza 3 is the beginning of the high point of the child's experience of his unitary world. The external world streams before him as an unbroken experience, a fact indicated, as J. Hillis

Miller has noted, by the pronoun "it" which is repeated ("it was running, it was lovely" to describe a "totality /in which/ . . . all /things/ are, like subject and object, inextricably mixed, aspects of the single, unitary 'it'."[92] (Miller seems in error, however, in omitting the complementary "adult" perspective whose presence works against his thesis that in Thomas's poetry the subject-object problem is assumed to be solved from the start.) The word "lovely," used twice, is not only a common child's word but it also carries the important idea that love is an essential part of the child's ability to remain at one with the outer, natural-supernatural world that flows by him ("it was air / And playing, lovely and watery") like a vision (love = an element, like water, air). Why fire should be "green as grass" has stumped critics, who usually say that it is an overly compressed phrase meaning fire as intensely red as the grass is green (cf. stanza 1: "happy as the green was green"). Recalling, though, that "windfall light" in stanza 1 may mean that light falls like green apples and is thus in a sense green light, Thomas could mean here that to the child whose perceptions are visionary the fire and grass (and the light) are greenly burning in his perceptions of them.

Lines 5-9: the child goes to sleep under the "simple" stars (cf. "it" above) because he perceives them as being true, whole, pure, unadulterated, uncomplex, unified, completely themselves with nothing added (a unity of opposites and divisions such as physical/spiritual, subject/object, etc.). Going to sleep, the child believes that the farm vanishes, for to him it is a function of his own subjective perception, not an object totally external to him, autonomous and therefore threatening. Outside his bedroom there are "horses / Flashing into the dark" of night and mind as sleep comes. Like the "tunes from the chim-

neys" during the day, the horses also hint at the child's development into a poet whose Pegasus-imagination will produce poetic tunes out of the mind. But now, two ominous birds take away the farm and hayricks at night. The "owls" prophesy the coming burden of adult knowledge while the "nightjars," harsh-voiced birds known as "goatsuckers" because of the folk belief that they suck on goat's udders, forecast sexual knowledge, the introduction of cacophony into the child's so far tuneful world, and the child's maturation (the hay of stanza 1 is now cut and in ricks). Still, oblivious to the significance of owls and nightjars, the child feels "blessed among stables" and goes to sleep, sure that the farm has been borne away to some obscure place (his own mind, perhaps) for its reality depends on the child's ongoing act of perceiving it. Sun and moon, day and night, sleep and waking, the four elements and the child are all united in this stanza.

Stanza 4: matching stanza 3 at the heart of the poem, this stanza begins with the awakening of the child from its sleep of stanza 3, an awakening that leads to an intense awareness that the child's relation to external nature is a recapturing of that Edenic consciousness which shall become more threatened by the adult's view in stanzas 5 and 6. The child is "awake" (l. 1) and, as in stanza 3, believing that the farm vanishes when not sustained by the child's perception of it, the child thinks that the farm has "come back" from its nocturnal absence, a "wanderer white / With the dew" of innocence and grace. That the farm is a "wanderer," unstable, dependent on the child for its existence, makes more disturbing the appearance of "the cock on its shoulder," the bird of morning suggesting an awakening sexuality that will transform the child into an adolescent and thus threaten the child-perceived farm. Another pair of clauses beginning with "it" repeats stanza 3 in

depicting the undivided unity of the child's perception; yet though shining, "it was Adam and maiden" as well, "maiden" being just the right words for the child's growing sexual awareness without actual experience. Awake at any rate, the child perceives the world as if today, not yesterday, was the first day of creation: "the sky gathered again / And the sun grew round that very day." The sky seems maternal nature gathering her skirts, but as Fowler noted, the verb "fathered" is from the story of creation in Genesis 1:9 -- "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together." The sun, too, was created in its three dimensions "that very day" even though the day before it was "young once only" (st. 2) to the adult telling the tale. Here, "round" can mean spherical or "around," the second meaning along with "again" (l. 4) suggesting the maturing adult's qualification of the child's diurnal re-experiencing of Eden in its perception of unfallen nature. The last four lines, widely praised as the best lines in the poem, are seen by Fowler and Walford Davies as the first explicit intrusion of the adult perspective into the poem.[93] Greatly enlarging upon the background of the poem, the adult poet solemnly recognizes in his own childhood experience a recapturing of the experience of Adam in Eden:

> So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
> In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses
> walking warm
> Out of the whinnying green stables
> Onto the fields of praise.

This description of Eden and creation takes the child's single experience of stanza 3 over into myth. Going to sleep in stanza 3, the child saw the stars as "simple," an Edenic perception matched in stanza 4 by the "simple light" of the creating Word (Eden = spinning place, spun by God). The horses in the dark of stanza 3 become the first horses of creation

here, "spellbound" by the magic of God's primary imagination. The stables of Fernhill are now the single "green stable" of Edenic nature out of which the horses come as from the womb to be praised by worshipping man. Since God "creates" nature by his primary imagination and since the child equally creates the world he perceives, the child, like the adult poet again creating but by his poetic imagination, becomes god-like in his actions. Thus, the adult poet, by creating a poem, recaptures his childhood's untroubled relationship with nature, a feat which in turn allows the adult poet (but not the child) to break through to a moment of insight in which he suddenly apprehends original creation. Calling himself "a spinning man" (P 4) as poet and imagination "magic," the poet can match God spellbound horses with his own spellbinding evocation of childhood's Eden and the mythic Eden beyond.

Stanza 5: after the upsurge in stanza 4 of this single child's experience into myth, this stanza begins with the growing dominance of the adult's elegiac mood. Recapitulating syntactical and imagistic patterns from stanzas 1-4, stanza 5 shows the easy intercourse of human and natural orders as the child is "honoured" (a civic virtue) by "foxes and pheasants," upper class beast and bird that parallel the child's earlier lordly status. The "lilting house" of stanza 1 is the "gay house" here, another transference of feeling from child to the outer world. The ambiguous "as" appears in the significant phrase "happy as the heart was long" (as = as long as/as if/because) which locates the center of the child's vision in the emotions, not the reasoning head that plagues the time-conscious adult. The sun, earlier seen as "young once only" and "round again," is now "born over and over": to the child, newly created every day by his Edenic perception of it, but to the adult a sign of the passing of time and childhood. Clouds, too, are "new made"

like bread or cookies. The child's imposition of his own desires on nature in stanza 1 (ll. 6-9) as a prince recurs here in line 5 -- "my wishes raced through the house high hay" -- the breathless h's imitating the exhausted child whose speech rushes through the hayfields like a wind. Such exercises of imagination are called "my sky blue trades." Now a tradesman as earlier in the stanza a country squire hunting foxes and pheasants, the child shifts identities at will as in stanzas 1 and 2 where he likewise moved from being prince down to huntsman and herdsman. That imaginative perception should be a trade now rather than spontaneous play may hint at the older child's increasingly necessary exertion to perceive nature as unfallen, an exertion that forecasts the adult poet's even greater exertion in his trade or "craft" of poetry that needed, in the case of "Fern Hill," 200 worksheets to produce what the younger child perceived every day. In fact, in lines 4 and 6-9 the adult begins to emerge more clearly as the center of attention, his loss rather than the child's joy our central concern. Says Thomas the adult, as a child "I ran my heedless ways" for "nothing I cared" that time, who granted me childhood, would take childhood away. Time's "tuneful turning" matches "tunes from the chimneys" in stanza 3: the music of the spheres (or a chiming clock?) and the whistling sound of escaping smoke from the fireplaces being partakers in the same harmonious praise of childhood and nature. These "morning songs" (also: mourning songs) must include "Fern Hill" itself but also the singing of water, birds, animals, the child, and time itself that permeates the poem. Now "green and golden" in all the positive and negative senses of those words, the children follow time the pied piper "out of grace," for childhood is a sort of grace in Romantic experience. The single child who saw himself as the center of the world is now "the children,"

for the adult's wider experience tells him that the child's vision of the world is a commonplace one, often lost. Ending with a comma after "grace," stanza 5 runs over into stanza 6, its lack of self-containment imitating the child's growing sense that his world which he rules as prince is slipping away from his total control.

Stanza 6: if stanzas 1-4 present the child's view of the landscape with an important, implicit adult undersong, and if stanza 5 is a transition to the adult's now dominating elegiac mood, stanza 5 marks the overt emergence in its complete form of the adult's view of his own childhood. The opening "Now" of stanza 1 becomes the opening word "Nothing" of stanza 6, whose "Nothing I cared" repeats part of line 6 of stanza 5 and echoes "carefree" in stanza 2. The "lamb white" days of childhood are gone: as in Keats's "To Autumn," the lambs here are ready for the slaughter as childhood ends. Another autumnal image reminiscent of Keats's poem is presented in lines 1-2 where Thomas says that as a child he never thought that time would lift him "up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand, / In the moon that is always rising." The hay that has been mentioned in stanzas 1, 3 and 5 is now cut and stored in the hayloft in autumn. There, swallows gather for their autumn flight to other climates (cf. owls/nightjars in stanza 3 that fly away with the farm and hay). Foretold by the autumnal lambs, hay, and swallows (= reincarnated souls in some symbologies), the child enters the autumn of childhood, his shadowless noontide existence now threatened by the setting sun who casts the child's shadow. Before "below a time," now he rises up into time and into adulthood (into the loft). As a hand writes poetry, an art usually entered upon in adolescence, the child's shadowy hand may foretell the beginning of the emergence of his poetic self whose growth is occasioned by the desire

to compensate for the loss of childhood. Thus, although "the moon that is always rising" takes the child in time, for the shape-shifting moon is changeable, the moon as imagination simultaneously signals the child's incipient development into the poet who will forever preserve his own childhood by coming, by its very loss, to write this poem.

Going to sleep now, not for a night, but, as a child, forever, the child is unaware that, unlike stanza 3 in which the farm went away during his sleep and returned with his awakening to perceive it, the "high fields" of unfallen upper nature would be lost forever and that he would "wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land." By its position in the line, "fled" indicates an action ascribable simultaneously to the child and to the farm. Does Fernhill as the child perceived it still exist, having fled somewhere far away; or is the farm where it always was but the child abducted by time into a region far from the farm? As it stands, the line says both things: mutually interdependent, both "child" and "farm" are cast adrift when cast apart, the subject and its object severed by the growth of the child into man. From the sleep of stanza 3 the child could awaken to the farm again in stanza 4; here, the sleep obliterates both child and farm as the long night of adulthood begins. The final three lines of the poem contrast the child's own view of himself as "young and easy" with the adult's retrospective knowledge that he was actually "green and dying." Still, time showed him "mercy" for a while and "held me" like a mother holding a baby whom she knows will grow up to be a man. In spite of his being the unknowing victim of the same "time," the poet recalls that this is so, "though I sang in my chains like the sea." Like Wordsworth's boy in the Intimations Ode who fears the <u>shades</u> of the <u>prison-house</u>, here the child whom time lifts up by the <u>shadow</u> of a hand is held in <u>chains</u>. The heavy anapests

of the final line imitate the tidal rhythms of the sea; in addition, however, both rhythm and sea, along with the word "sang," suggest the "chains" of rhythm and rhyme that bind the singing poet who has written "Fern Hill" as a direct result of having lost his childhood vision and of wanting to recapture it again. Since the tides of the sea are governed by "the moon . . . always rising" (l. 3), there emerges a hidden image of the child's development into the poet whose poetic imagination would go back to "redeem" the child self by writing this poem.[94] The child's "high fields" have become the adult's enchaining "sea," just as in "Poem in October" the vision of the poet's child self occurred on a hilltop while the adult town remained in rain and mist by the sea below. Even the use of "like" to introduce the closing simile, as in stanza 4, line 1, the only other "like" simile in the poem, rather than the child's fusion of metaphorical and literal, betrays a distancing of the adult from a spontaneous response to nature.

"Fern Hill" moves through three distinct phases: spontaneous vision (child), memory (adult), and poetic creation (the poet). Accused by Roy Fuller of being "dilute Wordsworthianism," the poem has been defended by Fowler in his exhaustive analysis of various patternings within the poem: "'Fern Hill' is . . . not dilute Wordsworthianism because it is not dilute . . . /but rather/ one of the most highly wrought odes in English."[95] The accusation that "Fern Hill" is simply a collection of repetitive descriptions has, I think, been answered in my use of Wordsworth's "two consciousnesses" to guide us through the details of the poem to reveal the poem as a depiction of two overlapping but unmatching views of a particular landscape, that of Fernhill. An interesting comparison can still be made, however, between the great amount of reiteration that <u>is</u>, admittedly, present in "Fern Hill" with

Kroeber's remarks on "Tintern Abbey" that it is Wordsworth's passing "from merely loving nature to awareness of loving nature" (my italics) that explains "why the poem is so repetitive" and why Wordsworth himself said that in landscape description "'repetition and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind'."[96] That Thomas himself knew that the "two consciousnesses" of spontaneous happiness and remembered happiness, as in "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill," were a matter of awareness seems clear from a passage in Thomas's short story "Extraordinary Little Cough" in which he speaks of a particular day during his childhood as being "some years before I knew I was happy" (PA 45; my italics).[97] Ferris records a similar remark made by Thomas later in life: "There's only one thing worse than having an unhappy childhood, and that's having a too happy childhood" (Ferris 49). What Thomas has been able to do in both of the last two poems examined is what Davies calls an enactment of "a version of Negative Capability, seen as a kind of Edenic instinctiveness."[98] That is, Thomas imaginatively re-enters his own childhood consciousness, savouring it, knowing it, and finally recapturing it, but not out of a corrupting nostalgia; for in both "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" the adult consciousness is also fully developed as a dramatic counterweight to the lost childhood vision.

In this chapter we have seen Thomas's development from 1936 to 1945 in his poems on poetry that emphasized the release of relationship-bringing love as the poet's main task; in poems on marriage that employed sacramental language in an attempt to understand human love as both sexual and sacred, as a door through which the isolated self could become one with the female other and with the cosmos as a whole; in the war poems that developed the sacramental language and the concern

for love as a magical power that the poet, in his new role as intermediary, father, priest could employ against a threatening, death-dealing outer world; in three long poems on love as a regenerating and healing force; and finally, in two poems on nature and childhood in which the two consciousnesses of the child and the adult confront a particular, remembered landscape with tragically different responses but with renewed faith in the poet's ability to re-create his own childhood consciousness through the poetic act. In all the poems, the underlying questions have remained the same as in Thomas's earliest letters and poems: how to unite the faculties of the mind and how to match the perceiving self with the perceived world in such a way as to bring joy, release love, and know both the self and the world as simultaneously natural and divine. In his few remaining years, filled with personal difficulties, Thomas faced the final task of trying to move beyond elegiac evocation of the past to the imaginative creation of a "world" that paralleled the "cosmic" world of the early poems but which would now remain an externalized, particularized, and singularly Welsh landscape in which the imagination could realize itself and be free from death and time. This task, never wholly completed but certainly begun, is the subject of the poems of 1946-53 and the final chapter of this study, Chapter VI.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]T. H. Jones, p. 47.

[2]Korg, pp. 107, 96.

[3]Walford Davies, New Critical Essays, p. 156.

[4]Stephens, New Critical Essays, pp. 53-54.

[5]T. H. Jones, pp. 34-35; see also Vernon Watkins quoted in A. T. Davies, Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body (London: Dent, 1964), pp. 33-34.

[6]Walford Davies, New Critical Essays, p. 140.

[7]Walford Davies, "The Poetry: An Introduction" (DTS); Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Cardiff, Wales: Univ. of Wales Press, 1972); Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 44.

[8]Hoxie Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, VI, 1920-65 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press), p. 77.

[9]Kermode, p. 98.

[10]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas, p. 44.

[11]Stephens, New Critical Essays, p. 53.

[12]Stanford, p. 86.

[13]Babette Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time (New York: Holt, 1952), p. 373.

[14]Korg, p. 117.

[15]T. H. Jones, p. 111; Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Open University), p. 20; Moynihan, "Dylan Thomas's Conception of Poetry," Forum, 4 (Fall-Winter, 1965), pp. 10-16; Williams, p. 120.

[16]Stanford, pp. 115-16.

[17]Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern, pp. 21-22.

[18]Miller and Slote, p. 352.

[19]Moynihan, Craft and Art, pp. 230, 257, 262; Kidder, pp. 165-67.

[20]Hart Crane, The Complete Poems (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1966), pp. 193-94: "The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower / . . . / . . . /I build /within, a tower that is not stone."

[21]Kidder, p. 140.

[22]Korg, pp. 100-01, 103.

[23]T. H. Jones, p. 33.

[24]Nicolette Devas, Two Flamboyant Fathers (London: Collins, 1966), p. 197.

[25]Evelyn Broy, "The Enigma of Dylan Thomas," Dalhousie Review, 45 (Winter, 1965-66), 499.

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[36]Fraser, p. 26; F. W. Bateson, "'The Conversation of Prayer': An Anglo-Welsh Poem" in New Critical Essays, p. 221f.

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[83]Sinclair, p. 25.

[84]Karl Kroeber, Romantic Landscape Vision (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1975), p. 36; Hartman in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Bloom, p. 51; Abrams in Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 206.

[85]C. B. Cox, "Analysis of Dylan Thomas' 'Fern Hill'." Critical Quarterly, 1 (Summer, 1959), 134-38; Ochshorn, p. 59; J. V. Crewe, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas," Theoria, 38 (1972), 71-72.

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[87]Jack Jenkins, "How Green is 'Fern Hill'?" English Journal, 55 (December, 1966), 1180-82.

[88]T. H. Jones, p. 70; Alastair Fowler, "Adder's Tongue on Maiden Hair: Early Stages in Reading 'Fern Hill'" in New Critical Essays, pp. 230, 238, 246-47.

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[90]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas, p. 60.

[91]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 199-200.

[92]J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 197.

[93]Fowler, New Critical Essays, p. 232; Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Open University), p. 32.

[94]On moon as imagination in Thomas one could cite several instances. The most famous is from "Author's Prologue" where Thomas the poet is "the moonshine / Drinking Noah of the bay" (P 5) sailing in his ark of poetry.

[95]Wolfe, p. 87; Fowler, New Critical Essays, p. 255.

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[97]First cited by Walford Davies in Dylan Thomas, p. 63.

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CHAPTER VI

THE POEMS OF 1946-53

Between 1946 and his death in 1953 Thomas composed only nine poems, two of which are fragments, in addition to several BBC broadcasts on childhood and the radio play Under Milk Wood. Six of the nine poems appeared in the volume In Country Sleep (1952): "In Country Sleep," "Over Sir John's Hill," "In the White Giant's Thigh," "Poem on his Birthday," "Lament," and "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night." In addition to these poems, Thomas wrote "Author's Prologue," a long verse preface to Collected Poems: 1934-52. "Elegy," left unfinished at his death, was, after "Do Not Go Gentle," Thomas's second poem on his father's death. Finally, "In Country Heaven," the framing poem of the ambitious, unfinished sequence by the same name, exists in several intermediate drafts.[1]

Coming to these poems after the poems on poetry, marriage, war, love, and childhood-in-nature of Chapter V, one is justified, I think, in seeing them as something of a "final" statement of Thomas's poetic concerns. There are at least three reasons for thinking so. First, Thomas told various friends towards the end of his life that he felt he had used up his power as a purely lyric poet. Second, In Country Heaven, significantly left unfinished two years before Thomas died, was intended to be an heroic attempt to move beyond the personal lyric to something larger -- epic in scope if not in form -- that would clearly and convincingly raise philosophical questions and resolve them by creating a

new cosmology and by introducing God as a fully realized dramatic character separate from the Poet-as-Christ composite of the earlier poems. On a Caedmon record album dealing with the framing poem "In Country Heaven," a friend of Thomas, Humphrey Searle, reporting a conversation with Thomas held near the poet's death, confirms the suspicion that Thomas felt he lacked the ability to finish the ambitious poem: "He told me he had two long poems in mind, one of which was about shepherds on the moon watching the earth after it had been destroyed in an atomic war. And I asked him when he hoped to be able to finish the poem, but he said he didn't think he could finish it, which was very sad, because I know he was feeling rather depressed about his work."[2] Similarly, in Dylan Thomas in America, John Malcolm Brinnin states generally that Thomas's depression and increasingly serious alcoholism lay in part in this feeling of frustration with his work: "I knew as well as he that his unhappiness lay in the conviction that his creative powers were failing, that his great work was finished . . . he was without the creative resources to maintain and expand his position" (DTA 180). In addition to the evidence of the unfinished In Country Heaven, there is, thirdly, the fact that at the end Thomas was turning his attention away from poetry to the radio play (Under Milk Wood) and even opera, for he died on the eve of flying to California to begin work with Igor Stravinsky, a great admirer of Thomas, on an opera about the rebirth of man and Eden after an atomic war.

With the exception of the humorous poem "Lament" and the two elegies to his father, "Do Not Go Gentle" and "Elegy," Thomas's final poems follow naturally from the poems of 1936-45. As we saw in Chapter V, Thomas's early poems culminated in Altarwise by Owl-light, a sequence that makes the greatest claims for the poet as his own Christ, redeeming

himself and the world by imaginative action. The cosmos/man analogy became an actual identity, the cosmos sometimes being absorbed into the poet and the poet sometimes being absorbed into the cosmos. In Chapter V, beginning with poems like "After the Funeral" and "The Hunchback in the Park," Thomas begins to shift away from the cosmos and towards the specific landscape, usually identifiably Welsh, as the focus in his ongoing theme of the relation of self and world. The self is now distanced somewhat from the landscape. Thus, sacramental language taken over from Christianity emerges in the marriage and war poems to indicate the poet's new role as priestly intermediary between the reader and divine immanence in the landscape. Simultaneously, the theme of love emerges as a central concern of the poet. As the celebrator of man and nature, the poet, even though less intensely and immediately at one with the outer world, is still an active agent, as in the marriage poems, "A Refusal to Mourn," and "Ceremony After A Fire Raid," in which the power of love and imagination conjure up wordy spells against death, time, and the loss of visionary perception. Even in "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" the conflicting "two consciousnesses" of the child and the adult create dramatic action that is not resolved except by the poet's acceptance of the loss of vision as irreversible. In the final poems to be considered here, the poet still appears as an intermediary figure -- father, Aesop, lapidary, local historian, Noah, sea voyager -- but one who is less an active agent than a more deeply satisfied, happily resigned observer, spectator, describer, witness, perceiver of a spiritualized landscape whose mysteries now seem more fathomable. The great evils of both the early and the middle poems, time and death, are finally worked into the poet's vision of nature as holy; in fact, all of the last nine poems deal with death to one degree or another. Finally,

Thomas tries to create poems in which what he understands by "God" and "man," "heaven" and "earth," becomes clear. In trying to come to terms with death and God, the natural and the supernatural, Thomas begins but does not complete a re-introduction of the "cosmic" perspective of the earlier poems as a background to poems that still continue to be set in a localized landscape.

In the three poem-sections and one poem fragment that were to make up part of In Country Heaven, Thomas comes to see the difference between "earth" and "heaven" as a matter of the state of mind of the perceiver. Although "God" and "man" now remain distinct, God is far from being all-powerful and must be assisted by the poet, as in "Author's Prologue." In fact, God may be a "fable" made up by the poet. In any case, by attempting to understand God, heaven, and death, Thomas, in the poem-sections of In Country Heaven, comes to be able to perceive nature as a child does, as divine ("In Country Sleep"), to understand death as a transforming process that releases the soul into a deeper life in nature ("Over Sir John's Hill"), and the power of love between individuals as a force (and that must be satisfied) even after the individual's death ("In the White Giant's Thigh"). Before examining the three finished poem-sections that were to have been sections of In Country Heaven,[3] I shall examine Thomas's important prose synopsis of the unfinished "framing poem" and the extant stanzas of the framing poem itself, "In Country Heaven."

Thomas was greatly moved by the dropping of the first atomic bomb at the end of World War II. He refers to "the Only Atom" (SL 384) as a dark god and wrote his final completed poem, "Author's Prologue," specifically about the threat of nuclear annihilation. The proposed libretto for the Stravinsky opera, too, dealt with the second emergence

of man and Eden after nuclear war destroyed all life on earth. Thomas's unfinished poem In Country Heaven was to have been the poet's preemptive imaginative answering of the apocalypse of destruction with an apocalypse of love. In fact, the plot of "Author's Prologue" is a shorter, simplified version of what In Country Heaven should have been. In the broadcast talk "Three Poems" delivered in 1950, Thomas read "Over Sir John's Hill," "In Country Sleep," and "In the White Giant's Thigh" as those poems that "will, one day, form separate parts of a long poem which is in preparation: that is to say, some of the long poem is written down on paper, some of it in a rough draft in the head, and the rest of it radiantly unworded in ambitious conjecture" (QEOM 155). Preceding his recitation, Thomas provided a long but important summary of the "frame" into which these three poems would one day fit:

> What can I say about the plan of a long 'poem in preparation' . . . except that the plan it is grand and simple and that the grandeur will seem, to many, to be purple and grandiose and the simplicity crude and sentimental? The poem is to be called 'In Country Heaven.' The godhead, the author, the milky-way farmer, the first cause, architect, lamp-lighter, quintessence, the beginning Word, the anthropomorphic bowler-out and blackballer, the stuff of all men, scapegoat, martyr, maker, woe-bearer -- He, on top of a hill in heaven, weeps whenever, outside that state of being called his country, one of his worlds drops dead, vanishes screaming, shrivels, explodes, murders itself. And, when he weeps, Light and His tears glide down together, hand in hand. So, at the beginning of the projected poem, he weeps, and Country Heaven is suddenly dark. Bushes and owls blow out like candles. And the countrymen of heaven crouch all together under the hedges and, among themselves in the tear-salt darkness, surmise which world, which star, which of their late, turning homes, in the skies has gone for ever. And this time, spreads the heavenly hedgerow rumour, it is the Earth. The Earth has killed itself. It is black, petrified, wizened, poisoned, burst; insanity has blown it rotten; and no creatures at all, joyful, despairing, cruel, kind, dumb, afire, loving, dull, shortly and brutishly hunt their days down like enemies on that corrupted face. And, one by one, those heavenly

> hedgerow-men who once were of the earth call to one another, through the long night, Light and His tears falling, what they remember, what they sense in the submerged wilderness and on the exposed hair's breadth of the mind, what they feel trembling on the nerves of a nerve, what they know in their Edenic hearts, of that self-called place. They remember places, fears loves, exultation, misery, animal joy, ignorance, and mysteries, all we know and do not know.
>
> The poem is made of these tellings. And the poem becomes, at last, an affirmation of the beautiful and terrible worth of the Earth. It grows into a praise of what is and what could be on this lump in the skies. It is a poem about happiness.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The remembered tellings, which are the components of the poem, are not all told as though they are remembered; the poem will not be a series of poems in the past tense. The memory, in all its tenses, can look towards the future, can caution and admonish. The rememberer may live himself back into active participation in the remembered scene, adventure, or spiritual condition. (QEOM 156-57)

Several key ideas here ought to be commented upon. First, Thomas calls heaven "that state of being called his /God's/ country," which explains the title of the whole work as In Country Heaven. For Thomas, "heaven" is not a place removed from nature; rather, it is that very nature itself perceived by a person who has entered the "state of being" which is "heaven." This idea goes far back in Thomas's thought. Poem Thirty-One in the February 1933 Notebook is entitled "Now understand a state of being, heaven" (N 200-01). Here in this early poem this state of being includes "future, past, and present" just as in the prose summary of In Country Heaven where the heavenly hedgerow men will "remember" their earthly lives in all three tenses. In the early letters, too, Thomas spoke of delving into the self as a Dantesque journey from Charon's ferry to Jordan (SL 15). He also said: "I want to believe, to believe forever, that heaven is being, a state of being, and the only hell is the hell of myself. I want to burn hell with its own flames" (SL 84). Finally, in a 1933 letter that anticipates even the

title of the unfinished poem, Thomas says that "God is the country of the spirit, and each of us is given a little holding ground in that country, it is our duty to explore that holding" (SL 29). As the contexts of these excerpts make clear, "heaven" and "hell" are psychic states having to do with the right relation of the self to the world. In the prose summary quoted above, heaven is no more or less than nature itself perceived in its visionary form as holy and deathless. The "earth" in Thomas's cosmos lies outside the state of being of heaven, but not very far outside or below as the "In Country Heaven" poem fragment makes clear. Thomas even uses the word "ward" in the poem fragment to indicate God's rather peripheral though paternalistic relationship to earth and all creation. Country Heaven itself is inhabited by "hedgerow men" and God as a "farmer" in the Milky Way as well as "the beginning Word," the Poet of poets, and "the stuff of all men." Also described as the wrathful God of Welsh Puritanism, the God of the poem lacks these negative traits which are part of a catalogue which is in part a humorous flight of fancy. Weeping at the death of earth, God seems a helpless, pitying observer, apparently shocked by the atomic suicide of earth, unsuspected by him. The "heavenly hedgerow men" are the inhabitants of Country Heaven. We know that they have attained that state of being called "heaven" because their memories of earth are called up from minds that are unified, the unconscious and conscious being "the submerged wilderness and . . . the exposed hair's breadth of the mind." Furthermore, they have "Edenic hearts" because Country Heaven is equated with Edenic consciousness and because earth is also Edenic ("that self-called place") although earth's inhabitants cannot perceive it as such. Speaking as himself, Thomas says that his poem is supposed to be "an affirmation of the beautiful

and terrible worth of the earth . . . it is a poem about happiness." In other words, though earth is destroyed as the poem opens, we as readers are supposed to become aware of earth's true Edenic nature and thus to help prevent its actual demise in a nuclear war. Within the poem, the hedgerow men who tell their separate tales of the earth exercise "memory in all its tenses" for memory "can look towards the future, can caution and admonish." Earth's death in the poem is remembered; this memory may prophesy what we readers may one day undergo. This exercise of memory is also an exercise of imagination, a form of redemption, for earth is remembered through "Edenic hearts" and is thus re-created within the borders of Country Heaven. This process is described quite clearly as a form of Negative Capability: "the rememberer may live himself back into active participation in the remembered scene, adventure, or spiritual condition" (my italics). Told to us by Edenic hedgerow men, these stories ought to provide answers to questions plaguing the poet concerning love, childhood and nature, all three of which he sees fall victim to time or death. Thus, Country Heaven and earth are two overlapping landscapes, as in Thomas's earlier poems "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill"; but the spontaneous, joyful, childhood vision of Country Heaven that occurred on Sir John's Hill and Fern Hill in these two poems is now supplemented by the adult poet's equally joyful vision not only of Country Heaven but of time and death as mere instruments that release the self, not into a heaven above, beyond, or apart from but in nature, fully perceived as holy, wherein the individual self retains its individuality even as it flows freely through the hedgerows of paradise.

This prose summary illuminates the existing stanzas of the poem "In Country Heaven" (P 215-16). Drafted in 1951, this poem is later than

the three poem-sections of In Country Heaven, "In Country Sleep" (1947), "Over Sir John's Hill" (1949), and "In the White Giant's Thigh" (1950). However, since it was intended as the framing poem and as without it and the prose summary the other three poems may seem unrelated to any superstructure, "In Country Heaven" will be examined first.

Thomas's first biographer, FitzGibbon, records that Thomas told Brinnin in 1951 that the poems of In Country Heaven are "poems in praise of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God" (Life 326). What Thomas may mean is that the poems in this grouping are non-orthodox, non-Christian in theology. He also seems to mean that whatever "God" means is incorporated within "God's world," nature. Walford Davies' caveat concerning these poems also applies: "One thing which seems certain is that we ought not to place the poet inside any orthodoxy. That the poems are all often full of a wide range of quite orthodox allusions has only a limited significance. The received Christian framework is often an imaginative means whereby we provide ourselves . . . with a structure for thought -- and without which, in certain imaginative contexts, we cannot think at all . . . Dylan Thomas, with a resistance to any kind of dogmatic conclusiveness, nevertheless accepted a tradition whose images, and indeed some of whose insights he felt to be congenial as poet and man."[4] With both Thomas's and Davies' warnings in mind, we can more easily read "In Country Heaven" as a description of Country Heaven, or nature in its visionary form, at the moment when God (or the poet) in a "fabulous," anthropomorphic projection of sacramental love that permeates and orders Country Heaven first learns that earth has destroyed itself in an atomic war. In stanzas 1-3 Thomas describes the coming of morning in Country Heaven. God himself is the sun (but the sun is not merely physical but like Blake's sun of angels) who "crosses the breast

of the praising East, and kneels" on the "abasing hill" being himself "humble in all his planets." Here the natural and the supernatural are woven into one by the imagery: the sun rises in the East in the morning to sit for a moment on a hillcrest. This action is not a "metaphor" or "analogy" for divine action; to Thomas, it is a divine-and-natural action if only we could perceive it as such with the "Edenic hearts" of the heavenly hedgerow men. This is a strange God indeed: he makes the sign of the cross, kneels to pray (to whom, I wonder?), feels humility before the created world, and weeps. Thus, as in the statement above recorded by Brinnin, Thomas seems to elevate unfallen nature over God who is something of a shepherd, farmer, warden, caretaker of the creation which outshines him. Stanza 2 describes the landscape of Country Heaven itself in terms familiar to us: the valley is "canonized," thus simultaneously humanized and spiritualized as St. Valley. Above and below are parts of an ordered whole, for in the church-like "naves of leaves" a bevy of "angels whirr like pheasants," and in an exquisite image describing the twinkling of starlight in the dew Thomas sees the valley as a place where "the dewfall stars sing grazing still," an image uniting grazing, cattle, dew, the stars, and the music of the spheres in a single unitary action. Three variant readings in this stanza -- "in the last ward and joy" in line 1, the "final valley" in line 2, and "all sings that was made and is dead" in line 3 -- reveal that Thomas is playing with the idea that when earth died, Country Heaven itself grows dark, possibly to die itself, for Country Heaven and earth are in a sense the same place seen differently.[5] In stanza 3 we return to the sun (God), kneeling prayerfully on the hill to weep for earth. The falling rays of the sun descend in a pair (deftly preventing us from seeing too abruptly the sun as a one-eyed God!):

Light and his tears glide down together
(O hand in hand)
From the country eyes, salt and sun, star and woe.

All stars are suns, and, now apparently all eyes of God, for in lines 4-5 the picture of the rising sun on a hilltop over mountain and valley becomes a ragged face of God as an old man: his tears gliding "Down the cheek bones and whinnying / Downs into the lowbrosing dark." Variant readings for these three lines are even clearer about this image: "He cries his blood and the suns / Dissolve and run down the ragged gutter of his face: heaven is blind and dark." As in the early poems, the universe seems here to be partially revealed as a human body which is also God. The poet, who tells us quite clearly in stanza 1 that he is simply the recorder of God, "whom my heart hears," by placing God near the heart, reminds us that God is a "country of the spirit" in which each man may live. Stanzas 4-6: a description of the landscape of Country Heaven, though it is a landscape slowly growing dark because of the death of earth. (In the prose summary Thomas says that he intends the hedgerow men to sit in darkness as they tell remembered tales of earth.) Heaven is made of "hamlets," not cities, in which the "loft lamps" of the stars swing like the lamp of a night-watchman. Elsewhere, however, "bushes and owls blow out like candles" during Lent, reminding us that Country Heaven is a landscape in which a church is "sunken" metaphorically as it was in the seas of several of Thomas's earlier poems. Shepherds and their flocks also fade away:

And seraphic fields of shepherds
Fade with their rose-
White, God's bright flocks.

Appropriately red, the flocks reflect the "seraphic" fields, for red is the color of the Seraphim, the highest order of angels as well as the color of clover. Even a shooting-star is frozen in its hawk-like fall

over "twelve apostles' towns" (towns, not cities, and Judas is not excluded from this undogmatic heaven). The fading to darkness of all these images from a sacramental landscape seems to indicate that the failure of men on earth to see nature as holy, a heaven, will lead them to a pass where they are all able and willing to murder the earth, and in doing so, draining God of that much of his power as it exists in nature and threatening Country Heaven itself: if no one perceives Country Heaven as it is, it dies (cf. "When I Woke" and the child's perceiving the farm in "Fern Hill"). We know from the prose summary, however, that the hedgerow men intend to fight against this end by exercising negative capability, by recapturing and recreating their earthly lives in the darkness of Country Heaven. In stanzas 6-8, the final extant stanzas of this unfinished poem, Thomas seems to be moving toward that end by telling us that Country Heaven exists outside of death. In stanza 6, a fox prowls after cockerels but "they sleep sound." In stanza 7 (on the Caedmon album's reconstruction from the drafts, not as printed in Jones's edition of The Poems) we hear that no mouse or bird will be killed by fox or owl. Rather, all the animals gather, like the hedgerow men, in order to tell the stories of their lives on earth. Writing this framing poem, Thomas naturally thought of Chaucer's framing poem, the General Prologue, whose tale-telling pilgrims become here the animals of Country Heaven:

> All the canterbury tales in the wild hedge --
> Row of the small, brown friars
> The lithe reeve and rustling wife
> Blithe in the tall telling.

In the fragmentary stanza 8, God's falling sunrays of tears reveal the poet himself, "Young Aesop fabling by the coracled Towy." A significant line used in a different form in "Over Sir John's Hill," this image suits

the poet who is about to record the life stories of the animals of Country Heaven (beast fables). The Towy, a river in Wales, definitely links Country Heaven with a landscape on earth, making the difference between the two a matter of perception, and Young Aesop makes the poet the knowing intermediary who can describe Country Heaven by looking out over a particularized Welsh landscape (that of the River Towy) one morning at sunrise which is also God-rise. In The Poems, Jones breaks off this poem at the first two lines of stanza 6: "For the fifth element is pity / (Pity for death)." Not only an explanation of why predatory animals like the fox do not kill young cockerels in Country Heaven, these lines introduce the major theme of the three finished poems that, as poem-sections, fit into the framing poem (or at least were intended to do so by Thomas): the function of death in taking us from earth to Country Heaven. In each of the three poems that follow, this question is faced -- in a father's talk to his young child about a thief who will one day come to visit her, in a modern Aesop's recording of a hawk's killing of sparrows, and in a local Welsh historian's recounting of the tale of women who died childless and whose yearning for love and for children survives in nature where their consciousnesses still live and yearn. Emphasizing respectively the future, the present, and the past, these three poems fulfill the requirement of the prose summary of In Country Heaven that "memory in all its tenses" would both recollect and forecast. Though taking place in the "state of being" of earth, each poem's resolution depends upon the framing poem "In Country Heaven" whose fading, sacred landscapes, like those perceived by the child in "Fern Hill," the old man in "A Winter's Tale" or even the lovers in "Unluckily for a Death," are landscapes the perception of which takes away the poet's fears of death and time.

The first of the three poems that form parts of In Country Heaven is "In Country Sleep" (P 197-201). Speaking of all three poem-sections of In Country Heaven, Moynihan says that "these three works reveal a complete development in Thomas's redemptive concepts. They form a complete picture of the God-universe and the man-divinity being merged and yet, paradoxically, still carrying on their respective man or God functions."[6] Moynihan's detected sense of merging and separating identities applies in two ways to "In Country Sleep." Like its predecessors "Poem in October " and "Fern Hill," "In Country Sleep" deals with the problem of the perception of nature by the child and by the adult. Unlike the former poems, however, "In Country Sleep" greatly lessens, in fact, almost entirely abolishes, the sense of a great divide between child and adult in the perception of nature as holy. Although the poet, speaking the poem to his sleeping infant daughter, identifies a mysterious figure called the "Thief" who will visit the child, this Thief, a development of the similar figure of "Time" in "Fern Hill," robs the child of its visionary perception of nature only in order to perpetuate a higher unity and greater good after adulthood's separation from continuous vision: that greater good is the assumption of the grown-up child into Country Heaven where it shall enjoy an eternal, deepened apprehension of nature as vision. Significantly, it is the father in the poem who describes, in a long chain of epiphanies, the revelation of Country Heaven within the landscape. Unlike "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" in which the perception of holy nature was carefully ascribed to the child, here that distinction is pointedly omitted. In fact, the child remains asleep throughout the entire poem, and the poet, who addresses her directly in Section I, moves to the more objective third-person perspective in Section II in order to show

that these epiphanies are his as well as hers. All that separates daughter and father is the father's understanding of the Thief and the Thief's function in the natural-supernatural order and a partial loss of spontaneous response. As Moynihan says, "nature is heaven because . . . all the attributes of nature sans death becomes a description of eternity."[7] But death, only one of the significances of the Thief, is a necessary means of transformation to bring us back to Country Heaven after the fall into self-consciousness. Furthermore, if Korg is right in describing this poem's landscape as "the visible counterpart to the realm of imagination" then the poem is not only concerned with "the Wordsworthian theme of the loss of the imaginative powers of childhood" but with the final assumption of the self into the world of imagination symbolized by Country Heaven.[8] A final point to be made concerning the particular structure of this poem -- a father talking to a sleeping child and describing a spiritualized landscape -- is made by Walford Davies, who, noting the similarity between "In Country Sleep" and one of Coleridge's "conversation poems," "Frost at Midnight," comments: "the acceptance of the countryside as a salutary inheritance, the convergence of two human lives in the poet's reverie, the unstressed feeling of relationship at the poem's core, combine to make 'In Country Sleep' -- in Coleridge's Horatian phrase -- sermoni propriora. The father-daughter, daughter-maturity relationships of this 'conversation' poem are rooted in a landscape which offers natural emblems of growth and decay, innocence and experience."[9] Beyond this concern with a daughter's growth from childhood unity with nature to an awareness of death is the further justification of death as a "way" to reach the state of unbroken perception of nature as sacrament and vision without the loss of individuality or else the removal to a completely non-

natural realm of existence.

Section I (st. 1-9): in stanzas of long, rhyming syllabic lines, the poet-father of a daughter who has fallen asleep to the telling of fairytales, assures his child that various fears (of ogres, evil animals, or sexually aggressive males in fairytales) she might have while sleeping are groundless, for holy nature and the "country sleep" of childhood will protect her against all enemies except the "Thief" who comes in the "fall" of the year into winter and the fall of childhood into wintry adulthood. Some critics such as Korg are annoyed that only a "thin thread of statement" stretches through the poem.[10] The situation, however, of a father lulling to sleep and keeping asleep his child with long strings of images of landscape description seems dramatically justifiable to me. Stanzas 1-3 open the poem with the father's assurances that the sleeping child's fears that might wake her from childhood's "country sleep" will not truly bother her. In stanza 1, the opening admonition ("never and never") introduces the child's never-never land with its fairytale landscape. She is "my girl riding" to sleep (Little Red Ridinghood) who fears that the big bad "wolf in a sheep white hood" will leap out and eat her heart in the "rosy wood" of her body and the landscape in which she lives. But she lies safe from the "wolf" who might bring death or loss of innocence for she is "spelled asleep," that is, read to sleep by the poet telling her fairytales and sleeping throughout her childhood in the "spell" of spontaneous vision. Stanza 2 begins with a hopeful imperative: "Sleep good, for ever, slow and deep, spelled rare and wise" for a child's vision of nature is wisdom, a magical-imaginative spell, shortlasting, but deeply experienced in the years to the child seem slow in passing. Childhood is the sleep of reason. Her fears of the wolf having been dispelled, the girl sleeps soundly as her poet-

father tells her not to fear that any male figure ("a homestall king or hamlet of fire") to lure the "honeyed heart" from the child amid a gawking ring of ganders or boys, where she will be burnt or spiked. Puberty and its dangers are still years away. Stanza 3 is concerned with further fears, that for no good end innocent creatures are killed in nature's rapacious woods and that a witch on a broom may come to take her away. What besides the poet-father's assertions shields her from terrors equivalent to those that make adult self-consciousness a burden? Stanzas 3 and 4, in answering, make one of the poem's central points: "you are shielded by fern / And flower of country sleep and the green-wood keep" (nature as a fortress of greenness). Stanzas 4-5 explain how Thomas can put such trust in nature. Not until the "stern / Bell" of her death shall the child be bothered by such fears, for the landscape is not haunted by wolf or witch but only by the moon of imaginative perception:

> For who unmanningly haunts the mountain ravened caves
> Or skulks in the dell moon but moonshine echoing clear
> From the starred well?

Governing the child's vision of nature, the moon reveals in the next lines that Country Heaven now lies within the landscape waiting to be perceived: "a hill touches an angel" (not the other way around). The "nightbird" (owl/nightingale) conducts a service ("lauds") in the religious community sunken into the landscape: "nunneries and domes of leaves," a crucifixion-like "robin breasted tree" through whose branches moonlight shines in a triple beam "three Marys in the rays." Rain tells its beads, an owl knells, while the tales and fables of fairytales and the poet praise nature or graze like cattle, eucharistically, on "the lord's-table of the bowing grass." This epiphanic moment of insight under the moon has been a brief look into Country Heaven, the "sanctum sanctorum

the animal eye of the wood." The Holy of Holies, the central sanctuary of the temple of nature, is the "animal eye" for animals bridge the gap between isolated human consciousness and the unconscious life of plants and minerals. Animals are conscious to a degree but not estranged from nature; they, in what they are, are analogous to the life of imagination, as in Thomas's earlier poem "How Shall My Animal" in which, as here, "animal" stood for the power of imaginative perception. Stanzas 6-7 back away somewhat from the intensity of stanzas 4-6, although Buddhistic "prayer wheeling moon" and "chant" echo the preceding stanzas. Here, however, the father tells his daughter that which she ought to fear -- "the Thief as meek as the dew." The identity of this Thief has been much discussed. In the Bible (Revelations 16:15 and II Peter 3: 9-10) the Thief is divinity. Other guesses include death, time, grief, maturity, loss of innocence, organized religion, Christ, knowledge, experience, and so on. Probably one should take heed of Thomas's remark to a reporter who asked who the Thief was: " Alcohol is the Thief today. But tomorrow he could be fame or success or exaggerated introspection or self-analysis. The thief is anything that robs you of your faith, or your reason for being" (Ferris 212). Ultimately, the Thief must be death; more nearly, he is the growth into adult self-consciousness, as Thomas seems to hint in his suggestion that the Thief could be excessive self-concern. In the Texas Manuscript Collection, I found a cryptic note by Thomas concerning the identity of the Thief. Thomas writes: "If you do not know the Thief as well as you know God, then you do not know God well. Christian looked through a hole in the floor of heaven & saw hell. You must look through faith, & see disbelief" (Texas: Works, P-Z). Here, the Thief seems to mean a "loss of faith" equivalent to the loss of childhood vision in the poem ("faith" = imaginative perception in Thomas).

Only by experiencing the loss of vision in adulthood can the child know the complete, defining dimensions of that which was lost: thus the entry into Country Heaven is a resolution of opposites (God/Thief, imagination/visionary despair) into a higher unity than either childhood innocence or adult estrangement. For now, however, the child can avoid the Thief in all his forms for she lies "spelled asleep" in a childhood-in-nature and she shall follow her father's advice: "The country is holy: O bide in that country kind, / Know the green good." Nature is a moral teacher and morally is "good." Stanzas 8-9 admit that eventually the Thief will come, or, more precisely, since he comes "each vast night" the child will grow into an awareness of the Thief's constant presence. The Thief will come "until the stern bell talks / In the tower," a phrase suggesting that the thief is an agent of death more than death itself, and thus, represents maturity. Eventually, the child will grow out of childhood and be escorted through the long night of adulthood into death, after which "the soul walks / The waters shorn." Afterlife, then, is in nature, not outside of it, but the soul's individuality is retained as it enters Country Heaven, nature without death, as Moynihan nicely put it. Stanza 9 ends Section I with a catalogue of images of "falling" -- rain, hail, dew, leaves, stars, appleseed, and finally the world itself "silent as the cyclone of silence." This falling of all things into silence after the lauding nightingale and echoing moonshine of stanzas 4-5 signals the child's impending fall out of contact with Country Heaven, which will fall into the silence of a mute, incommunicative landscape.

Section II (st. 10-17): essentially an intense reiteration of stanzas 4-5 of Section I, stanzas 10-13 of Section II are another chain of epiphanic insights into Country Heaven; closing the poem, stanzas 14-17

offer a final explanation of the Thief and tell why his coming should not trouble the child. Stanzas 10-13 contain sixteen exclamation points, preceded by clauses or phrases that are moments of insight into nature as vision. In stanza 10 we return briefly to the child's world of fairytales to see Sinbad's "great roc" flying in the sky with the "reindeer" of Santa Claus. Earlier images from Roman Catholicism and Buddhism are now joined by Welsh Protestantism's "black bethels" which are here the nests of ministering "rooks." The Protestant's Bible becomes "the holy books / Of birds" for nature and poetic language have long since been united in Thomas's art. Other birds burn in sexual mysticism: "the cock like fire the red fox / Burning." All of these fairytales, mythic, sexual, and sacramental revelations in the Welsh landscape are said to be the result of "the leaping saga of prayer." A saga (OED) is a form of epic poetry, usually associated with medieval Norse or Icelandic stories of heroic achievement and mythic actions. Like "faith" and "belief," the word "prayer" in Thomas is not so much a religious as a poetic term, an assertion of desire and yearning that is linked to the foray of the poet's imagination into the external world. By "saga of prayer," then, Thomas seems to mean that the child spontaneously and the poet by the poetic act of evocative description actually sees or reveals the visionary landscape of Country Heaven. Stanzas 11-13 are a series of Romantic "moments" of existence in that landscape. Its sacramental nature is indicated by Thomas's traditional use of the "intricate image" to unite parts into wholes and of sacramental language to show the landscape as supernatural as well as natural. Birds are a "vein" in a "wrist / Of the wood," an image which partially humanizes the landscape: The night and "sloe," the fruit of the blackthorn, flow with chlorophyll-green blood in the "pastoral

beat of blood through the laced leaves." Now the wrist of woods has laced cuffs, and, not surprisingly, this image widens into the image of a "spinney" or wooded dell as a priest with sleeves crackling starched with frost: "the priest black wristed spinney and sleeves / Of thistling frost." The poetic and prayerful communion with nature reveals not only mythic creatures, human forms incorporating natural ones, and priestly presences, but the risen ghost of a dead "dingle" that sings resurrected in Country Heaven among the "surpliced / Hills of cypresses," another priestly lot. In the veins of all plants and animals sounds "the summer of blood." The natural-supernatural world is humanized in "the saga from merman / To seraphim." Mermen, half human and half animal, and seraphim, half human (form) and half divine (substance), indicate two extremes of the integration of man into Country Heaven. In stanza 13, the vision of Country Heaven becomes the most intense it will ever be in the poem. The "saga" of imaginative perception leads to a vision of cosmic harmony:

> Illumination of music! . . .
> . . . . . .
> Music of elements that a miracle makes!
> Earth, air, water, fire, singing into the white act

The presence of all colors, "white" is the all-inclusive act of imaginative perception in which the whole of the landscape of Country Heaven is apprehended. Balancing his panoramic view are two detailed images, the first of which is a gull skirting a wave as both it and the wave awaken from our normally limited perception of them as "mere" objects. The second image, one of the finest in Thomas, is a luminous, translucent image of a young horse moving across the moonlit water:

> And the foal moves
> Through the shaken, greensward lake, silent, on moonshod hooves,
> In the winds' wakes.

Horse, water, moon, wind -- all images commonly associated with poetry and imagination -- unite in an instant of powerful imaginative perception of nature whole. Stanzas 14-17 descend from vision to the sleeping daughter, whose inevitable visitation by the Thief is discussed more fully than in Section I and whose not unhappy future as an adult awakened out of country sleep is foretold. In stanzas 14-15 Thomas develops the idea we have encountered in "When I Woke" and "Fern Hill" that this vision of holy nature depends upon someone's being able and present to perceive it and to store it in memory. In fact, the prose summary of In Country Heaven makes such redemptive remembering the central task of the heavenly hedgerow men who exercise negative capability to do so. Here, with "my love asleep" (love = the child, the power of love that is part of the perceiving), the poet-father wonders whether

> the sky
> Might cross its planets, the bell weep, night gather her eyes,
> The Thief fall on the dead like the willy nilly dew.

This collapse of the cosmos into randomness ("willy nilly") might occur while the child's imaginative perceptiveness is hidden behind the divided eyelids, "the rift blue / Eyes." But "the turning of the earth in her holy / Heart" even as she sleeps sustains the "music of elements" above. Ironically, it is the child's ordering of nature by perceiving nature whole that now invites the Thief to visit her, having heard "the wound in her side /~the heart~/ go round the sun" that it sustains by perceiving and remembering. Since the child's joy is to see the whole order of nature, that joy will in no way be inhibited by the arrival of the Thief, for, as we are told directly or by similes, the Thief comes "designed to my love" by the same law that brings "the designed snow," "the dew's ruly sea," and the "ship shape clouds" (my italics). The last two words of stanza 15, all of stanza 16, and line 1 of stanza 17

form what must be the greatest syntactical conundrum in Thomas. Untangled by numerous critics, the general sense of these lines seems to be as follows: The Thief will come to the daughter, but he does not come to steal her heart that rules the tides like the moon ("her tide raking / Wound") nor her childhood in country sleep ("her riding high"); rather, he comes only to steal her false belief that he comes only to steal her imaginative vision of nature as ordered, and, being "unsacred" himself, to cause her to see a "lawless sun" of a purely material world of chaotically spinning atoms. In fact, the Thief is sacred, and he comes to rob her of childhood only in the sense that she must grow older in order to "die" into an eternal life in the deathless landscape that is Country Heaven. Thus, the poet-father says to her at the end of the poem: "And you shall awake, from country sleep, this dawn and each first dawn, / Your faith as deathless as the outcry of the ruled sun." Though she may lose the spontaneity of immediate response of vision, when she wakes up from the imaginative sleep of childhood, her "faith," which in Thomas means imaginative assertion as a willed rather than a spontaneous act, is as beyond the power of the Thief as the ordered sun ("ruled," not "lawless" as feared earlier). In a way, there is almost a hidden dejection ode here, but in Thomas the lost vision of childhood could not only be remembered, it could be evoked, re-created in "Romantic" images that record epiphanic moments of insight. Finally, the Thief in all his multifoliate significances is seen as both necessary and good, the door into an eternity in the landscape of imagination. In a letter of 1934, Thomas said of Blake what in this poem of 1947 he was able to say of himself: "if only I could say with Blake, Death to me is no more than going into another room" (SL 90-91).

As he says there of Blake too, so in "In Country Sleep" he comes to believe that the adult as well as the child can retain much of an original "love and awe of the miraculous world" (SL 91).

Unlike the sweeping landscape of "In Country Sleep," the second of the three poem-sections of In Country Heaven, "Over Sir John's Hill" (P 201-03), is almost a "case history" or outdoor laboratory experiment seeking answers to two questions: how can particular acts of killing in nature be justified and how can the poet possibly write poems about visionary landscapes that keep collapsing into scenes of death? There has been a great deal of critical commentary on this poem and a great deal of disagreement over what the poem intends. Therefore, it will probably be helpful in this case to work through the text of the poem and then examine the problems raised by the critics.

"Over Sir John's Hill" is another poem written in a complicated stanza of twelve lines of various lengths, carefully patterned by syllabics and end rhymes that may be full or assonantal and with a free use of sprung rhythm. The general action of the poem's five stanzas is as follows: above Sir John's Hill, a hawk waits to kill sparrows and other small birds, while, below, a heron and the poet observe. While the sparrows answer the hawk's call for their deaths, the poet praises both hawk and sparrows for the parts they play in the natural, holy cycle. Described as a saint or priest, the heron seems as conscious as the poet of the mystery of death and his mournful singing is transcribed by the lapidary-poet onto a stone by the shore. God is asked to have mercy on the sparrows and to save their souls. The first point to be made about the poem is that like its immediate predecessors it is set in a particular landscape observed directly by the poet. Thomas prefaces his reading of the poem over the BBC by saying

that "Sir John's Hill is a real hill overlooking an estuary in West Wales" (QEOM 158). One of the rivers that actually flows into the estuary, the river Towy, is mentioned in the poem. In fact, the landscape and these very kinds of birds are exactly what Thomas would have seen while looking out of the window of his cliffside workshop that is situated half way around the estuary from Sir John's Hill. Brinnin, for instance, who visited Thomas in Wales, was struck with how true his late landscape poems were to the scene at Laugharne: herons did walk on one leg with bowed heads in priestly fashion, for, as Brinnin discovered, "the iconography of his poems /is/ . . . generic to the landscape of his country" (DTA 128). In the Adix interview, Thomas, asked by an American professor whether it was true that "you always seem to put in your poetry just what you are seeing at the moment -- the heron, and the birds near the estuary, for instance?" Thomas replied (with some wryness): "Yes -- yes. I wanted to write about the cliff, and there was a crow flying above it, and that seemed a good place to begin, so I wrote about the crow. Yes, if I see a bird, I put it in whether it belongs or not."[11] Having determined, then, that this is another particularized landscape poem, we are faced with the problem of understanding the relationship of the poet to the landscape and the action that occurs there as well as the problem of the relationship of the heron to that action and to the poet. In stanza 1, in images of fire, hanging, and possibly the guillotine, Thomas begins the long description of natural predation. Above Sir John's Hill, a "hawk on fire hangs still": immobilized by a resistant wind, the predatory hawk is an executioner blazing apocalyptically before the sun. A "hoisted cloud" at "drop of dusk," "gallows," "fiery tyburn," a "noosed hawk" and a hawk who "pulls" up the birds -- all these images create a picture of an

execution, the sparrows or other small birds being victims. Unlike the death-dealing hawk, who is equivalent to the Thief of "In Country Sleep," the sparrows are ignorant of death (like the sleeping infant unaware of the Thief) and so "blithely they squawk," as they rise up from internecine quarrels out of "wrangling hedges" and a "wrestle of elms" to meet their death. Below this scene, "the fishing holy stalking heron / In the river Towy below bows his tilted headstone." At this point in the poem the poet has not yet entered as a dramatic character, "Young Aesop," so the heron's lowering of his head in prayer and sympathy does not seem to be a mere "projection" of human feeling onto nature. Is the bowing of the heron's head fortuitous, a coincidence, a pathetic fallacy, and, whether it is fortuitous or not, does the action indicate the poet's belief that all of nature, including death, is holy, that necessity is a sacrament? The pun on "headstone" (skull/tombstone) which also is a part of the act of bowing the head in prayer seems to say that what the poet does is to detect and bring out the latent metaphorical possibilities in the landscape in order to reveal sympathy and sacrament if it can be done without violating the essential naturalness of the outer scene. Thus, both the hero and the poem-making poet are necessary to perceive fully the sacred quality of the action of the hawk and the fate of the sparrows. In the fifth stanza, the hero "makes the music" while the poet engraves the notes in a stone that is this poem itself: nature and the poet thus cooperate through metaphor to reveal sympathy and religious meaning in a way somewhat more subtle than the "pathetic fallacy," as normally defined, would indicate.

In stanza 2 the hawk strikes and his commotion causes a strange effect:

Flash, and the plumes crack,
And a black cap of jack-
Daws Sir John's just hill dons.

The execution imagery associated with the hawk in stanza 1 is here extended to the hill that becomes a judge, putting his hat on after having removed it for the somber act of execution, now replacing it to indicate that justice has been done. The "cap," of course, is a flock of birds frightened by the hawk's plunging to kill who are scared into flight and who then alight on the hill. As the poet later enters the poem as "Young Aesop" telling us this beast fable, it might be noted here that in Aesop's Fables the jackdaw often appears as an ignorant bird, a fact that seems at odds with the jackdaws' participation here in a metaphor of enacted justice, just as the heron's prayerful sympathy for the birds seems at odds with its own predatory habits (it "stabs" for fish in stanza 2). In both instances, it is the Aesop-poet's ability to "read" a landscape and to detect its latent meanings, thus linking human consciousness (the repository of "meaning" and the imagination which finds metaphors in natural images) to the landscape perceived by the poet. Aware of the death by air, the heron is described as

the elegiac fisherbird / who / stabs and paddles
In the pebbly dab-filled
Shallow and sedge

(dab = a small fish; sedge = (1) a marshy shallow, (2) a flock of herons, or (3) a heron's station from which he watches for prey).[12] Killing small fish, the heron in itself may be elegiac only in its awareness of the killed sparrows, yet its actual priest-like posture and the complementary sympathy of the poet seem to shade off into one another so as to become almost, if not quite, indistinguishable. Speaking the words of the nursery rhyme "Mrs. Bond" (in which the cook Mrs. Bond tells ducklings they must die to be cooked so her customers might eat) the hawk calls to

the birds -- "dilly dilly . . . / Come and be killed" -- as if death were a happy game. In stanza 1 the fighting sparrows engaged in "child's play / Wars" among themselves; now the hawk treats them like children. Thus, if "In Country Sleep" described the landscape on the point of breaking through into a permanent vision of Country Heaven, "Over Sir John's Hill" is that poem's complementing opposite in its description of the same landscape from the completely "fallen" adult perspective of the hawk, heron, poet. Can Thomas justify this intentionally "worst possible case" against believing in Country Heaven? Stanza 2 ends with the entrance of the poet into the poem in his own character:

> I open the leaves of the water at a passage
> Of psalms and shadows . . .
> And read, in a shell,
> Death clear as a buoy's bell.

Here is Thomas in his adopted role in the later poems as interpreting intermediary. John Ackerman points out that these first appearances of heron and poet as priests put them forward as <u>observers</u> of the scene; later, in the heron's song and the poet's engraved poem, they become <u>interpreters</u> of the scene.[13] The poet is a priest reading from the psalter, nature's priest, who interprets her actions as well as being an Aesop, whose animal tales ended with a moral statement drawn from the action of the tale. Also, in creating his own poem, the poem becomes a "critic" of nature: nature is a book he reads and his poem is his critique of that book. By recreating the landscape in his poem, entwining within that re-creation his own sympathies and thematic interpretation of the outer landscape, the poet is completing the process of understanding nature by linking outer landscape to inner, subjective response, in a single imaginative act. He is needed to "read" the

shell and to turn the leaves of the book of water (nature in the flux of her processes). That he opens the holy book of nature at psalms (cf. the old folk practice of opening the Bible at random to receive prophecy) is important for psalms are song of praise. Thus, in stanza 3, while the hawk lures the "green chickens" of the bay to the explosive gallows of his sunlit claws ("his viperish fuse hangs, looped with flames"), the poet says that the birds will be "blest." They themselves seem almost anxious to die, singing "dilly dilly / Come let us die" (as if Thomas is saying that necessity and desire are or should be one). Similarly, the poet sings "all praise to the hawk on fire" for both hawk and small birds are participants in the inevitable sacrament of life and death. The hawk himself, earlier described as the "noosed hawk," will fall victim to death, for he is obscurely watched by the falling "hawk-eyed dusk."[14] Stanza 3 ends with the first overt linkage of the poet and the heron:

> We grieve . . .
> The heron and I,
> I young Aesop fabling to the near light . . .
> . . . saint heron hymning.

Also intended to be an image in the framing poem "In Country Heaven," the designation of the poet as a "young Aesop fabling" seems to mean that the poet is capable of interpreting this act of death in terms of his wider experience of Country Heaven or in the most intensely realized "moments" of landscape description in "In Country Sleep." In "Poem on his Birthday" Thomas speaks of "fabulous, dear God" and "Heaven that never was / Nor will be ever is always true" (P 210). As "fabling Aesop" here, Thomas may mean that the Aesop-poet creates heaven by imagining it against a landscape that seems at first to be foreign to human desire; thus, is "fabling to the near night" in an act of twilight

conjuration that joins with the heron's hymns to reveal a seashore where the human and natural are one. In the water of the wharves made by man, the "walls dance," sea walls reflected on the sunlit water, while "the white cranes stilt," at once birds and the mechanical cranes on the wharves. Thus, the heron seems a link between Country Heaven and the "fallen" landscape perceived by the adult poet. Cooperating with the heron by interpreting its actions, the poet is able to justify death as a way of achieving immortality <u>in</u> nature. Since "judging Sir John's elmed / Hill" has found the birds guilty, the poet and heron

> tell-tale the knelled
> Guilt
> Of the led-astray birds.

Critics ask how birds can have guilt or be sinfully led astray: are these not human experiences foisted onto the landscape? Walford Davies thinks that Thomas is intentionally using the pathetic fallacy here in order to show its absurdity; actually, he says, "the poem . . . is about the burden of human consciousness" for only the poet, he says, is aware of the mystery of death and yearns to believe that nature is holy and sympathetic to human desire. Similarly, Maud thinks that Thomas is just constructing fanciful conceits: "there is no real judgement as there is no real crime."[15] In a sense, both critics are right, but so is Elder Olson who seems to hint at the point I have been making. That point is that the hawk's actions can be fully followed out by a metaphor of execution, and since the jackdaws' alighting on the hill can be seen as a judge in his cap, and the heron and poet can be seen as priests, songmasters, readers at the psalter, that all of the "human" concepts of justice, guilt, praise, sacredness, sympathetic grief, and so on are not simply "dumped" by the poet into the landscape but are <u>actually present</u> in his imaginative perception of the deeper reality of the

scene.[16] What was metaphorically inherent in the scene is made actually present by the perceiving poet, the latent become the apparent. The birds who engaged in child's play were innocent and are now guilty, who were living are now dead, who received justice are now candidates for mercy. These opposites are significant to an understanding of the poet's call on God to "have mercy" on the birds for their souls' song." God exists not independently but as an immanence in nature ("God in his whirlwind silence save"); there is even the hint that the birds are a part of God, his voice, like the humning heron and fabling poet, without all of whom God cannot speak or sing. Commenting on this poem, Brian John sees Thomas's God as the bringer together of opposites within nature: "no orthodox being, /Thomas's God/ is, like Blake's Human Form Divine, no mere spectator but participant in a life /of/ . . . duality."[17] The God of "In Country Heaven" whose form merges with sun, mountain, and valley reinforces this view. Led astray from innocence and life into guilt and death, the birds may be saved for their "songs," for as in "In Country Sleep" where visionary nature is a musical dance of elements, singing seems an act that links one to Country Heaven. Still living in the fallen landscape of death and time, the heron "grieves," the river Towy sheds a "tear," being "wear-willow" in its water-worn, mourning banks, a hoot owl "hollow" as his "halloo" echoes hollowly through the hollow of birdless "looted elms." Echoing heron, river, and owl, but especially the heron, the poet creates this poem. The heron "makes all the music" but it is the poet who must "grave, / Before the lunge of night, the notes" sung by the heron who continues the killing by going fishing in the Towy. Thus, the interpretation of the landscape's meaning is a cooperative act between the heron and the poet. As the fallen world moves into "the lunge of night," the poet en-

graves a memorial verse "on this time-shaken / Stone for the sake of the souls of the slain birds sailing." Not an "eternizing" act that would fossilize the birds in the lapidary inscription, the poetic act is done for the sake of the birds: that is, the poem captures, for a while, the poet's important perception of the landscape and its inhabitants as holy, blessed, saintly, praiseworthy. The position of the word "sailing" in the poem's final line allows it to modify both "souls" and "birds" so as to say that the birds fly forever above Sir John's Hill, individual spirits released out of the fallen landscape into Country Heaven, which, like the slain birds, exists above judgment (there is no Country Hell in Thomas!) As in "In Country Sleep," death (Thief/hawk) is only a mode of transformation from earth to Country Heaven, itself a matter of increasingly visionary perception that requires death to make itself permanent. The actions of the heron and the poet's ability as intermediary to interpret these actions so as to understand death are the crucial facts that must be linked, and are, in the final sacrament of execution which is the poem itself: "Over Sir John's Hill."

As a final note on the poem, it should be mentioned that critics have found interesting parallels or echoes of Romantic poets in this poem. Walford Davies quotes from Keats's journal-letter to his brother of February-May 1919 Keats's distinguishing between the predatory hawk who must have his breakfast of robins and the human mind which may be capable, as Davies puts it, of "the same assertion of innocence in the face of ideological blankness which animates Thomas's poem." Similarly, Brian John in a first-rate essay on the influences on Thomas's poem quotes from Keats's March, 1818 verse epistle to Reynolds which deals in part with Keats's distress at watching a hawk kill birds over a seascape in

similar fashion to Thomas's own experience. Thomas's lifelong admiration of Keats as a yardstick against which to measure his own achievement makes these passages interesting analogues, at the very least.[18] John finds several other interesting comparisons with the Romantics: a link between Thomas's "fiery tyburn" and a passage in Blake's Milton, the idea of the poet as engraver in Blake's "The Little Girl Lost," the idea of sparrows having souls in Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," the linkage of various opposites in Blake's aphorism about progression by contraries (cited by Thomas himself in a letter) and the hooting owl whose message is echoed by the poet with the famous owl passage in Wordsworth's 1850 Prelude, IV, 364-88.[19] To all of these incidental Romantic debts I might add that Geoffrey Hartman's essay "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," which traces the Romantic nature lyric's indebtedness to the tradition of lapidary inscriptions (linking landscape, significant event, and the poet who "reads the landscape as if it were a monument on a grave") seems strikingly applicable to "Over Sir John's Hill." What Hartman says of this Romantic form applies to Thomas's poem whose heron is the genius loci mentioned below: "formally, it is the genius loci who exhorts reader or passerby; and the same spirit moves the poet to be its interpreter -- which can only happen if . . . he respects nature's impulses and gives them voice in a reciprocating and basically poetic act."[20] Hartman's definition of this Romantic form seems a convincing statement of why the heron and "young Aesop" are important in Thomas's poem, and why the heron seems more consciously aware of the action in the landscape than the other animals in the poem.

The final poem-section of the unfinished In Country Heaven is "In the White Giant's Thigh" (P 203-05). Like the paternal and Aesopian

roles of the previous two poems, the poet's role here as what Walford Davies aptly calls "the sad historian of a Welsh pastoral community" is one that places him at some distance from the landscape but in a position of teacher, interpreter, chronicler, commemorator of the events, past and present, that make up the landscape's history. Taking as a sequence the three extant poem-sections of In Country Heaven, one can see that "In the White Giant's Thigh" is the culmination of that which has been "remembered" so far by the hedgerow men whose creative memory was to function in all three basic tenses: the future ("In Country Sleep"), the present ("Over Sir John's Hill"), and now the past ("In the White Giant's Thigh"). Moreover, in terms of the Romantic myth, "In Country Sleep" with its long, evocative description of Country Heaven emerging from the ordinary landscape is a depiction of Edenic consciousness: "Over Sir John's Hill," set in the ordinary landscape whose genius loci, the heron, is the only certain link to Country Heaven, deals with the fall into a consciousness of death; and now, thirdly, "In the White Giant's Thigh" links the first two poems and then surpasses them in its regenerative vision of universal love as a power permeating all the living and the dead who inhabit the landscape without loss of individual identity or their human traits. In itself, "In the White Giant's Thigh" partakes of the traits of two definably Romantic forms -- the greater Romantic lyric and the Romantic nature inscription -- detected by Abrams and Hartman in Romantic poetry. Like the greater lyric, this poem depicts a man confronting a landscape in the present (ll. 1-12), remembering that landscape as it was in the past (ll. 12-45), and then reconciling the two landscapes and solving the "problem" of their divergence in a final section linking past and present with prophetic statement about the future" (ll. 46-60). Like the Romantic nature inscription, as in "Over Sir John's Hill," the poet's

own poem is a memorial to the landscape he perceives and becomes a part of that landscape which we perceive rightly only by the powerful images of the poem that define the self's relation to nature.

These similarities to Romantic forms may lie behind Thomas's description of the poem as "a conventionally romantic poem" (SL 360), though he could also have meant simply that its central theme is the regenerative power of love. The poem's particular landscape is a combination of the actual and the mythical. The "white giant" is one of those huge and hugely phallic male figures cut by primitive man on the chalky limestone hills in various parts of Britain. Thomas's friend John Davenport once said that the "white giant's thigh" was a particular place in Carmarthenshire, Wales. Thomas himself said rather inconclusively to Tindall (RG 293) that he had never seen the white giant and did not know its location (which implies that it exists even though he had not actually visited it). Also, Maud interprets a note on the poem by Thomas to mean that Thomas thought the huge chalk figure to be an "embodied god," a view consistent with the figure of God in the framing poem "In Country Heaven" in which God is emergent from a partially anthropomorphized landscape.[21] Thomas also told Tindall that he was familiar with the legend that girls would wander on the hillside where the phallic giant lay in hopes of being accosted by boys who would make love to them and impregnant them (RG 293). These hints about the landscape being one Thomas had never seen yet which he founded to some extent on extant examples of chalk figures have led two critics to search for sources for this landscape. Marlene Chambers discovered a Welsh legend about valley women, who, when the hill men defeated the valley men (their husbands), all, now widowed, jumped from a hill to their death and were later memorialized by their fathers who put stones all

over the hill from which they leapt, deprived of the experience of motherhood as in Thomas's poem.[22] Robert Singleton guesses that Thomas probably had the Cerne Abbas Giant in Thomas Hardy's Dorset in mind. Located ten miles north of Dorchester, this hearty fellow is 180 feet tall with a 30 foot phallus. Even today, Singleton says, brides to be visit the giant before their wedding to insure fertility.[23] This connection with Hardy has some weight. Thomas said that Hardy was his favorite poet, and he read many of Hardy's poems aloud on his American tours. "In the White Giant's Thigh," a poem about obscure local people, full of local legend, regionally set, with a deliberate use of many diatectal words, is Hardy-like. Davies' depiction of the poet in the poem as a "sad historian of a Welsh pastoral community" applies, though sadness is not all. Murdy has found out that the poem's final line which compares the dead women's undying love to signalling Fawkes' fires may come from Hardy's The Return of the Native where Eustacia Vye signals Wildeve in similar fashion.[24] More conclusively, Davies has detected more definite echoes of Hardy poems, especially "After a Journey" and "In Front of the Landscape," the latter strikingly similar in some respects to Thomas's poem in the depiction of the relations between a historian-poet and a hillside landscape containing the graves of women. As Davies says, both Hardy and Thomas are concerned to depict "re-created life-pleasures," to muse on the domination of time, and to evoke from the actual landscape glimmering hints of an underlying mythic one.[25] Unlike Hardy, however, Thomas sees beyond the domination of time in his vision of universal love that sustains the women, the giant, and the landscape. As James Miller says in his essay comparing Whitman and Thomas, both poets have a vision of an all-pervading cosmic love that is simultaneously sexual and spiritu-

al, a vision that makes "In the White Giant's Thigh," as Miller says, a sort of "sexual 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard'."[26]

Section I (ll. 1-21): the hillside landscape of the white giant's thigh (the present). Locating the scene in time ("this night") and place ("the high chalk hill / . . . there"), the poet-historian walks on the hillside "in the white giant's thigh," an ancient figure cut out of the limestone landscape by removing the topsoil and grass. The hill, too, is a "thigh," for "thigh" is a geographical term for that part of the hill under the "shoulder" (another anthropomorphic term)! The opening line, which Ferris tells us Thomas toiled over for three weeks (Ferris 269), is one of Thomas's frequent polysemous metaphors that link inner and outer processes: "Through throats where many rivers meet, the curlews cry." Like the "waded bay" of line 7, these "throats" help establish inner states and outer landscape. The "waded bay" is the womb of the women who take lovers in hopes of having children as well as being the point at which the rivers from the hills run down into the sea (as in the estuary at Laugharne which is undoubtedly part of the landscape here). Similarly, the "throats" of line 1 are the throats of the curlews (rivers = veins of blood), the women's yearning wombs (later called "veined hives"), the mouth of the rivers that flow into the bay, valleys through which rivers flow from mountains whose thighs and shoulders and giants further humanize the landscape. Finally, "throats," though plural, reminds us that the poet is here to unite his throat with all these other throats which he perceives as unifyingly flowing in and out of one another, thus breaking down man/nature and inner/outer divisions. Above, a "conceiving" moon: governs the landscape, for the poet's conceiving imagination is at work detecting deeper significances in the scene and the women, whose natural cycles follow the moon's, are

yearning to conceive children -- both acts of conception being empowered by love. The curlews speak for the women ("they yearn with tongues of curlews") and thus stands out from the other animals and the plants in the poem as genii loci (like the heron in "Over Sir John's Hill" though here the chronicling poet is more assertive and the genii somewhat less manifest than in the earlier poem). Sunken in the hill, the figure of the giant is like a god, embedded in the landscape as Thomas's sunken cathedrals were sunken in the sea in earlier poems. That he is "white" recalls the phrase "the white act" from "In Country Sleep," a color uniting all other colors and a sign of wholeness. Probably made of limestone, he unites death with phallic life, human form with nature, divinity with the physical. Containing women and ending in a "waded bay" and whose flowing rivers carry "seed," the giant is an hermaphroditic figure as well. Like "In Country Sleep" and "Over Sir John's Hill," this poem is set at dusk or night, possibly because in the framing poem Country Heaven is dark and the remembering hedgerow men speak their tales of a dead earth. In this landscape, long dead women

> lie longing still . . .
> . . . . . .
> Pleading . . . for the seed to flow.

Below "the night's eternal curving act," a sexual motion, the women, as the poet says his daughter will be when she dies or as the slain birds are in the two previous poems, retain their humanity and individuality even in death, a process that simply absorbs them into the landscape. They do not seem to be in Country Heaven yet but caught in a limbo occasioned by their failure to complete their sexual function in the world; therefore, they still yearn, even in death,

for the unconceived
And immemorial sons of the cudgelling, hacked
Hill.

Section 2 (ll. 12-45): looking at the landscape, the poet imagines the women and their lovers making love there (the past). Using several dialectal or archaic words (wains, gambo, shippen), Thomas evokes scenes of lovemaking between the women when they were girls and their farmhand lovers. With images of animal and vegetable life as well as the standard sprinkling of sacramental terms, Thomas creates a scene of sinless, guiltless, happy lovemaking that unites the human, the natural, and the divine all of which partake of the all-uniting act of love. The girls make love in and out of season, in "gooseskin winter" and under Ulysses' "ox roasting sun." They make love in the "wains" (hay-wagons) whose "wisps of hay / Clung to the pitching clouds," an image that unites earth and the heavens from the woman's position in the sexual act. The "moonlight" above with its starry "shapes of faith" is matched by "moonshade / Petticoats galed high," an image linking creative power and human lovemaking. The girls are "gay" with young boys or "sly" with rough ones, willing to sleep with "swineherd" in his sty or an "orchard man" whose "barbed gold" they devour. The "spinney moon" over a dell with a lake is also a meeting place, the lake an Aeolian harp played by love whose ripples "harp to a hailstone" (ripples = harp strings plucked by a hailstone or a stone tossed by a lover to "hail" the girl and keep his assignation). The human and the natural fade together in the act of love as we see "a bloom of brides in the hawed house" (hawed = covered over with wild thorn). Like the women, nature itself is full of sexual activity that is also spiritual: "small friars squeal" (chipmonks/moles) in "thistle aisles" in which an owl "crossed / Their breast." Like a church vault, does are "vaulting" to the "horned

bucks." A mole tunnels "under his pilgrimage of domes." In fact, we are told, "all the birds and beasts of the linked night uproar and chime" with the girls and their lovers, just as nature chimed for the father and daughter in "In Country Sleep." The only trouble with all this joyous sexuality is that these girls, now dead, "nothing bore, no mouthing babe to the veined hives" of their wombs and "breasts full of honey." Though living a life of pastoral innocence "on Mother Goose's ground," their "simple Jacks" (Jack Horners, no doubt) left them "barren and bare." This explains why in Section 1 the long dead women were yearning through the mediating throats of the curlews whose cries the poet-historian correctly interprets. Thus, at the end of Section 2 (l. 45), as he did in a single line referring to the present earlier in the section (l. 19), the poet calls upon the curlews to give him the power, under the conceiving moon, to be united with the women and to prophesy their future fates:

> Now clasp me down to their grains in the gigantic shade
> . . . . . .
> Now curlew cry me down to kiss the mouths of their dust.

A happier version of Thomas's early poems of necrophilia, this union with the women takes the poet beyond past or present.

Section 3 (ll. 46-60): the poet envisions the landscape where the girls loved as women as superimposed on the present wilder landscape of overgrown graves, and he comes to understand the women's fate (past, present, and future). Lines 46-52 unite past and present in images like "the dust of their kettles" and "bracken kitchens" which create a montage effect of overlapping photographic impressions. Now the women live in houses where the harvest kneels," a complex image suggesting graves ("the faded yard," once farmyard), old houses overgrown with grain, and grain stalks prayerfully remembering the dead

even as the stalks themselves crumble into the earth. Trees and hedge where the guardian curlews perched have long since been cut down with "billhooks," a tool whose name links the human act of cutting with the very birds that, having lost their homes, sing in their blood-riveted throats ("the minstrel sap ran red"). Earlier, the poet saw that the women's tombstones were almost gone: "the names on their weed grown stones are rained away" (l. 8). Now, not rain but the sun has "scrubbed / Off" the phrase "Beloved . . . / . . . Daughters" from the stones. But scrubbing is an act of cleaning, and one feels that the tombstones are vanishing because they are false symbols of death and/or eternity that are at odds with Thomas's vision of eternity-in-nature and death as the doorway thereto. What the curlews tell the poet as he kneels to kiss the dead women's dust is that they and their lovers are "alive and well" in the landscape, safe and sexually active in the white giant's thigh. The poet asks the curlews on behalf of the women: "Teach me the love that is evergreen after the fall leaved / Grave." As an "evergreen," love is natural yet supernatural (undying), and the afterlife is to reside in Country Heaven, that evergreen Eden beyond the door of death. The women's love for their "hale dead and deathless" lovers remains "love for ever meridian," high noon under the moon that lights up the night of the ordinary landscape. Though seeming to be "the daughters of darkness" when viewed by the casual observer in the ordinary landscape, the women actually "flame like Fawkes fires still." Punning on "foxfire," the strange illuminated decay in trees that may be a symbol of supernatural luminosity in seemingly dead matter, the poem ends with a vision of the women and their lovers still trying to conceive children, even after death. Celebrating a failure to destroy an existing political order, Guy Fawkes Day must parallel the poet-

historian's coming to understand that natural order, against whose evidences of death unfulfilled desire he might wish to rebel, is good, an occasion for joy and celebration. Some ambiguity in grammar prevents a final understanding of whether or not the women's yearning is totally satisfied, in lines 57-58 Thomas says the women

> to these
> Hale dead and deathless . . .
> Love.

Do the women love towards or for their lovers? Are the lovers united? Even if they are, do the women finally conceive? Ferris reports that in a notepad found among Thomas's things after his death, Thomas had listed among ideas for future poems "Continuation of White Giant" (Ferris 269). Continuation would have been purposeless if the women never conceived, for Thomas has made that point already. In any case, he too felt, apparently, that the poem needed to be extended. As it stands, though, "In the White Giant's Thigh" is a strongly written poem that serves, in its praise of "the lover that is evergreen," as a fitting conclusion to a substantial, though unfinished poem, In Country Heaven.

Opinions may vary concerning the final worth of the framing poem "In Country Heaven" and the three poem-sections "In Country Sleep," "Over Sir John's Hill," and "In the White Giant's Thigh" that make up the unfinished In Country Heaven. Some critics prefer to read the three completed poems separately from the framing poem and the prose summary of the frame. Certainly the relation between frame and the poem-sections is not always terribly close: the hedgerow men who were to remember these poems all seem to be the poet Dylan Thomas, although his guises as father, Aesop, and local historian are separable speakers that are somewhat distinguishable as dramatic characters. In my view,

the crucial framing poem, of which we have all or parts of eight stanzas, gives us the central clue which I have discussed above: Country Heaven, as Thomas himself said, is a "state of being," nature as we know it minus death, as Moynihan put it. Death is finally explained as the door through which we pass forever into that place. Here on "earth," however, we may have a vision of Country Heaven when we see the landscape holistically, like the child and its imaginative father in "In Country Sleep." In less visionary moments when acts of death seem to argue against the existence of Country Heaven, the poet as fashioner of nature inscriptions, perceiver of the genius loci like the heron or curlews, may use his metaphorical skills to link himself, through heron or curlews, to a humanized landscape in which death leads to eternal life in nature. Finally, the poet-historian of an actual landscape that shades off into the mythical (again through the agency of the genius loci, the curlews) perceives the eternal presence of "evergreen" love that unites nature, man, and divinity under the "linked night" of sexual-spiritual congress. In these poems, the imagination, as the power that perceives Country Heaven behind the ordinary landscape, is crucial. The poet's more distanced, objective stance that allows him first to observe, describe, and metaphorically link himself to the landscape and then to mediate, officiate, memorialize in the act of writing the poem takes Dylan Thomas near the end of his search for a solution to the problem of the relation of perceiving self and perceived world.

Beyond the poems of In Country Heaven only five poems remain. Three of these are shorter, elegiac poems: "Lament," a farewell to sexual prowess, and two rather different poems on his father's death, the famous "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" and Thomas's very

latest, unfinished poem, "Elegy." Outside the framework of In Country Heaven and its spiritual dimensions, these three poems form a darker counterweight to the optimism of the more ambitious group just discussed. Two important, longer poems that complete the Thomas canon are "Poem on his Birthday," a poem closely related in feeling and landscape to the In Country Heaven poems but with a more shrill and desperate assertion of joy and praise by the poet in his own, old persona as sea voyager; and "Author's Prologue," Thomas's last finished poem, a long verse prologue especially written for Collected Poems (1952) and a poem which may well be viewed as a more modest (and possibly therefore a completed) attempt to explain the central idea of In Country Heaven concerning the threat of atomic war, the holiness of the Welsh landscape and thus of the whole natural world, and finally, the role of the poet in leading the forces of nature, life, and joyous affirmation against the forces of destruction. This final statement on the role of the poet as leader of a revolution of love and imaginative perception is the culmination of Dylan Thomas's development as a Romantic poet.

"Lament," "Do Not Go Gentle," and "Elegy" may be considered as a darker strain of poetic thought that culminates in "Poem on his Birthday," just as the overall intent of In Country Heaven finds a briefer but more complete expression in "Author's Prologue." Oddly, "Lament" may be viewed as a slightly cynical version of "In the White Giant's Thigh" while "Do Not Go Gentle" shares the elegiac concerns of "Over Sir John's Hill" in its themes of death and regenerative love in nature.

"Lament" (P 205-07) stands in relation to Thomas's poems on the power of love as an example of Romantic irony (in which "the writer creates an illusion, especially of beauty, and suddenly destroys it by a change of tone, a personal comment, or a violently contradictory

sentiment").[27] Originally entitled "Gooseberry Wood" and then "The Miner's Lament," as it stands "Lament" is spoken by an old man much like Thomas himself was growing to be, an "old ram rod" whose sexual autobiography from adolescence to the death bed is told. Possibly one of the lovers of the girls in "In the White Giant's Thigh," the old man who satirizes himself and whose rebellious career that ends in detumescence and a middle-class life exhibits several traits associated with Romanticism: he is concerned with the self (it is his sexual autobiography), with violent, non-rational experience (Thomas himself called this poem "coarse and violent" SL 353), he advocates natural morality over that acquired from tradition, and he is a parodic version of the Satanic hero, a rebel against the twin orthodoxies of church and marriage that, though they claim his tired body in the end, never violate his ever rebellious soul. Thomas's comment to Brinnin in America in 1950 is applicable here: Thomas described himself as a young poet as having been "arrogant and lost" and as a middle-aged poet of some stature sadly "found and humble" (DTA 32). Composed on the same worksheets as "Do Not Go Gentle," "Lament" shares with that elegy an insistence on experience, and rebellious rage against all restraints, social, religious, or even natural (age, death) on the integrity of the self and its desires. Above all, however, "Lament" is a first rate bawdy poem, though bawdy with a satirical edge cutting two ways -- against society yet against the poet himself who thought he could remain autonomous and apart forever. Its essential good humor, above all, should not be missed in a formal analysis.

Critical commentary on this poem has been slight. In a study of five worksheets in his possession, Oliver Evans concludes that both "Lament" and its companion poem "Do Not Go Gentle" exhibit a preference

for 'natural' morality over one which has been merely acquired -- a theme which links him /Thomas/ . . . to Wordsworth, to Whitman and to the whole school of nineteenth-century American transcendentalism." Evans also notes the similarities between "Lament" and the ballad form as revived by the Romantics.[28] In a recent issue of The Anglo-Welsh Review, Gregory Bentley has closely analyzed "Lament" as a key instance of Thomas's development of the "Pan motif," an example of Thomas's "optimistic Pantheism." Revived during the High Romantic period with the printing of Thomas Taylor's versions of the Orphic Hymns and first employed extensively by Mrs. Browning, the Pan motif, Bentley argues, links nineteenth- and twentieth-century Romantic poets. Viewed in this tradition, "Lament" develops two aspects of the Pan motif: the death of Pan (the old man's detumescence and death) and the psychological truth of the god Pan (the old man's non-orthodox, anti-social, naturalistic morality and interpretation of life). Bentley comments on the general action of the poem: "in 'Lament,' the narrator's natural goat-god self conflicts with the civilized community represented by the church and his wife. The narrative movement of the poem is the narrator's lamentation of his eroding emotional, psychological, and spiritual being which eventually results in the death, not merely of his sexuality, but also of his free and unconventional self."[29] Like Yeats's late figures Crazy Jane and the wild old wicked man, the hero of "Lament" affirms the very sexuality he is losing. As a humorous but dark contrast to poems like "A Winter's Tale," "Unluckily for a Death," or even "In My Craft Or Sullen Art," this poem in its vision of love as an insufficient agent to keep the self free from the restrictiveness of tradition is very gloomy. As Kohak says in her unpublished dissertation on the idea of time in Thomas's poetry, "Lament" only "reminds the

reader of the great hopes that had earlier characterized Thomas' poems about love, as lovers had attempted to make a full union and affirmative act out of the finite and fallible materials of themselves."[30]

Divided into five 12-line stanzas rhyming abcdabcdefef, "Lament" progresses through the poet's sexual autobiography from adolescence (st. 1), youth (st. 2), manhood (st. 3), middle age (st. 4), to old age and the death bed (st. 5). The poet's story begins when he was a "windy boy," full of the windy poems of the Notebooks and unsteadily adolescent. His first love affairs as seen in this stanza seem to have been imaginary, though this is not exactly clear. He is "shy," has a "blush," worries that the "rude owl" in "gooseberry wood" will become a "telltale tit" to reveal his guilty desire. A word for all seasons, "tit" can be teat, a hussy, a bird, mouse, or horse (OED). His real or imaginary bowlings down of girls like bowling pins took place "on seesaw sunday night," in open defiance of Sunday (pointedly not capitalized in the poem) which until recently in Wales was still a day of worship and little else. Exaggerating the sexual attraction of "my wicked eyes," the prurient Lucifer seems to be speaking wishfully when he says "the whole of the moon I could love" as well as all "green leaved weddings' wives" who are also conquered. Remembering these affairs, "the old ram rod" is "dying of women" (l. 3). In stanza 2, he is "dying of bitches," for the adolescent has become "a gusty man and a half" with experience under his belt, so to speak. Formerly the "black spit or the chapel fold," now he is seen by the Welsh Non-Conformists as "the black beast" though he retaliates in seeing them as "beetles," encrusted in their rigid dogmas. The moon of imaginary or exaggerated sexual experience (st. 2) is now the confidently sexual "wicker / Dipping moon" which also puns by ex-

changing the positions of the w and d of the first two words of the phrase. In the spring of his potency, the old ram rod's drunkenness is compared to "a new dropped calf"; also, his own prowess causes "midwives" to grow in the ditches of his lovemaking. Even making love sacrilegiously in the "flues" of the choral organ (also: female organ) as well as the "cloven quilts" of the meadow and his own satanism, he "left my quivering prints," the children of love. By the time of his full manhood, he has become the anti-Christ to the church of the town, "the black cross of the holy house." The rebellious daring of his earlier sexual exploits has become the humdrum of routine conquest. With "brandy and pipe in my bright, bass prime," he is not a tom cat but a bull, "come to his great good time / To the sulky, biding herds." Settling into routine is the first hint that the rebel will fall into an orthodox lifestyle. He even considers the state of his "coal black soul" but decides to put off worrying about it till he is older. If stanza 3 is the "climax" of the poem, stanza 4 begins the "falling action": now middle-aged and only "a half of the man I was," the old ram rod, "dying of welcome" in stanza 3 is now "dying of downfall," both detumescence and the slow easing of the rebel into orthodox patterns of behavior if not of belief. Reviewing his career as cat, calf, or bull, he is now a "black sheep with a crumpled horn" whose "soul from its foul mousehole / Slunk pouting out when the limp time came." Uniting sexual and spiritual concerns in one of his earlier images of the penis, the old ram rod says "I gave my soul a blind slashed eye" and sexually "shoved it up in the coal black sky / To find a woman's soul for a wife." This almost certainly refers to the idea developed in the marriage poems that sexual intercourse could be a mystical, sacramental experience linking the self, the other, and

nature in a moment of union and insight. Disappointed in these high hopes, in stanza 5 the old ram rod pays the price for his compromise with society in marrying. The preachers' "serve me right" warning of stanza 4 comes true, for now the old ram rod is "a man no more no more." His "roaring life" has yielded a "black reward" and he is "dying of strangers." Who these strangers are is made clear in the following lines. As the church's good bells jaw" their tedious moralizing song, the poet is ministered to on his death-bed by his "sunday wife" who we learn in a striking appositive "bore angels! / Harpies around me out of her womb." These children (so unlike the Romantic nature child in Thomas's other post-war poems) are also abstract moral virtues (the children's Christian names as well?):

> Chastity prays for me, piety sings,
> Innocence sweetens my last black breath,
> Modesty hides my thighs in her wings,
> And all the deadly virtues plague my death!

Captured by social and religious conformity after the failure of sexual prowess (his means and the symbol of rebellion) to incorporate spiritual experience into its own church of the act of lovemaking, the poet's conventional behavior remains at odds with his inner longing for his old life as a rebel. Undercutting by Romantic irony the image of the poet as Romantic lover in the middle and later poems, Thomas at last seems able to joke about his inherited Welsh Non-Conformism whose extreme emphasis on guilt Thomas never entirely overcame psychologically.

Like "Lament," Thomas's famous villanelle, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" (P 207-08), is about an old man at the point of death. In a letter to Madame Caetani about the printing of "Lament" and "Do Not Go Gentle" in her journal Botteghe Oscure, Thomas says that "Lament" is intended "as a contrast" to "Do Not Go Gentle" (SL 359). Although

the two poems do contrast insofar as "Lament" is a bawdy sexual autobiography of Thomas himself where as "Gentle" is a poem without humor on the imminent death from cancer of Thomas's father, the two poems also share important traits. In both poems the central figures (the old ram rod of "Lament" and both the poet and his father in "Gentle") are involved in a non-rational self-assertiveness in the face of constricting outer forces: marriage and the church in "Lament" or the stark fact of death in "Gentle." In "Gentle" Thomas calls upon his father to assert his individualism until the end by an ongoing intensity of response to life and a defiant rebellion against death that is viewed not as evil per se, but only evil if its nearness encourages the dying man to resign himself to his fate and thus to live out his last few months in a state of calm acceptance that betrays the self as much as its succumbing to a restrictive "death" into social and religious conventions, as in "Lament." A villanelle, "Gentle" brings the concerns of the elegy to a form meant originally for light verses on country living (thus villa nelle). Not generally known is the fact that this is Thomas's second villanelle, the first, a shortened version of the true form, being "Request to Leda: Homage to William Empson," a parody of Empsonian poetry and critical theory which reminds us that Empson popularized the use of the villanelle for serious verse and is probably the main cause for Thomas's adopting this unlikely form for an elegiac theme.

Written almost entirely in the most common monosyllabic words, "Gentle" has inspired remarks like R. B. Kershner's comment that poems by Thomas like "Gentle" "are remarkably resistant to analysis through their very simplicity; like Thomas, we find ourselves invoking their magic."[31] Though this is certainly a true response, "Gentle," for a simple poem, has been found to be remarkably full of echoes of Romantic

themes and one Romantic poem. In addition, a study of the worksheets helps clarify the intent of a poem about whose generalized types of men who live various lives (the wise, good, wild, and grave men of st. 2-5) there has been disagreement.

Donald Hall reports that in a conversation with Thomas the poet expressed a dislike of "Gentle": "I told him that 'Do Not Go Gentle,' his villanelle, was a favorite of mine. He shook his head again. 'Why don't you like it?' I said. Because I didn't write it,' he said. I understood him, when he said it. 'You mean Yeats,' I said. He nodded his head. The language came from Yeats, he said."[32] Before Hall's reminiscence appeared, Thomas's critics had detected verbal echoes of Yeats, though it is unclear as to whether these echoes are meant as allusions (probably not), though they may mean that Thomas felt that Yeats's language held the key to the evocation of the experience that is the central theme of the poem: the defiant raging of the single self against all that enchains it. Thus, Stanford rightly notes that the poem's "gay pessimism" derives from Yeats's idea about tragic gaiety as in Lapis Lazuli; Walford Davies points out (SP 131) that Thomas's "rage," "blaze," and "gay" are a cluster from section 5 of Yeats's Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen, while Tindall (RG 204) notes that Thomas's picture of an old man raging in the darkness comes in part from Yeats's "The Choice."[33] In addition to Yeats, Byron's Childe Harold (Canto 3, stanzas 94 and 97) has been noted twice, by Poole and by Moynihan, as the probable source of Thomas's phrase "forked no lightning" in stanza 2 of "Gentle."[34] Describing the storm over Lake Leman at Geneva, Byron speaks of the mightiest of all storms that "hath forked / His lightnings" over the lake (st. 94). Later, the single word "lightning" becomes Byron's code word for "All that I

would have sought, and all I seek," though he fears his search for knowledge and experience will end in futility and death: "I love and die unheard / With a most voiceless thought" (st. 97). Just so, in stanza 2 of Thomas's poem, the wise men who sought to "know" and whose "words had forked no lightning" as Byron's tears have not, face their deaths without answers. Less specific Romantic influences have also been noted. Horace Gregory sees Blake's dialectic of opposites at work in the poem's balancing of life/death, dark/light, cursing/blessing, and, as Michael Murphy has shown, a conscious pairing of the four types of men who face death -- wise vs. good men (preaching vs. practicing wisdom) and wild vs. grave men (Dionysian vs. Apollonian responses to life and death).[35] Gregory also notes that "Romantic violence" of the poem in whose first stanza an old, dying man is urged to "burn," "rave," and "rage" against death, a rebelliousness which Stuart Holroyd calls an instance of the Romantics' "Promethean defiance" of the conditions of life.[36]

In the poem itself, this Romantic self-assertiveness is developed in terms of a landscape, appropriate to the tradition of the villanelle, but a landscape whose features reflect human feelings and actions. The projection of subjective response onto the outer landscape is reinforced by the poet's shift from imperative (st. 1,6) to indicative (st. 2-5) mood in the restatement of the double refrain, balancing his subjective concern with his own father's death with general commentary on the lives and deaths of types of men. In stanza 1, life and death are the "night" and "light" of a single day, the rhyming words of the double refrain emphasizing the central balance of opposites in the poem. The use of the word "gentle" instead of "gently" allows us to read it as an appositive as well as an adverb. Night is "good" for all

that is natural is good, including death. A child's safe sleep after being told "good night" is also present here. Yeats's distancing demonstrative pronoun keeps the night slightly at bay (RG 204), thus helping to make clear why the poet wants his father to burn, rage, and rave "at close of day" against "the dying of the light." Both life and death are good, and both are to be intensely experienced in themselves. Philosophical resignation is the only evil because it implies the self's giving up its own autonomy and assertiveness. Having begun with a stanza that speaks generally of "old age" yet whose imperative refrain is directed at the poet's own father, Thomas develops the poem by considering four possible kinds of lives and how the livers of these lives face their deaths (st. 2-5). In the final stanza, he returns to address his own particular father (st. 6). Most critics agree in taking the wise men of stanza 2 as intellectuals, philosophers, though the wise men who attended the Nativity may be ironically present as well. Philosophically resigned, being intellectuals they "know" but what they know is only that "dark is right," that that which is necessary and natural must be good morally, for "right" implies moral distinctions that require moral choice. Since there is no choice in dying, natural order subsumes morality -- an old twist on the idea that whatever is, is right. Being intellectuals, the wise men probably used reason to formulate their beliefs, so in line 2 Thomas begins with "because," telling us why logically they were unable to act out their philosophical recognition that natural order is morally right: it was "because their work had forked no lightning" that they urgently raged against their death. Words that translate themselves into events in the outer landscape and thus indicate the self's ability to control its relation with the world, to cast its own light on the outer darkness, is an old theme

in Thomas, especially in the early poems. Wise men, however, used reason to attain their wisdom; such rationalism, Thomas implies, is inadequate. Like Byron, these wise men fail to translate their subjective responses to life into a permanent illumination of the outer world into which they now must die.

Stanza 2 deals with the "good men," thought by Emery to be saints (WDT 54), by Tindall to be moralists (RG 204). The good men contrast with the wise men in leading lives of action based on moral distinctions and moral choice; like the wise men, whose intellect divorced them from emotional or sensual response, the good men in their abstract moral dogmatism denied the body and the imagination. Passing from the sea of life to the shore of death, they are "the last wave by," possibly waving good-bye to us as men of action and good will might well do at death. The wise men "know," but the good men are "crying" out for by their very nature they seek a public in which to act. The wise men's "words" forked no lightning; the good men's "deeds" were "frail," for, divorced from a sensual response to life such as that of the old ram rod in "Lament," they must mourn for lost opportunity, thinking ". . . how bright / Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay." Moral action should be integrated into cosmic harmony (the dance), natural order (the green bay), and imaginative experience (green bay = the poet's reward, like the laurel). The "good night" is "good" in a fuller sense than the "good men" can be: their goodness is that crew of deadly virtues that plagues the old ram rod in the final stanza of "Lament."

Stanza 3 follows the earlier rejections of rational understanding and moral behavior as adequate ways of approaching life and death by adding a more deeply felt rejection of the Romantic response to life.

The "wild men" have been called lovers of life, poets, and Dionysians. They seem to me to be Romantics, for they wish to link themselves to the outer landscape ("caught" the sun) and to do so as a result of the poetic process ("sang") which is also the means by which they praise and celebrate the natural world in which the sun, as in "In Country Heaven," is immanent divinity. Alas, the poet admits, even their response is futile: for the more intensely they respond to the sun (nature) and link themselves with it the more they "grieved it on its way" down into the darkness of night and death. Because they "learn" their error, Thomas may be saying that their spontaneous embrace of the outer world gave way to a disillusioning, distancing rational response, thus linking themselves to the equally unfortunate "wise" men of stanza 2. Oliver Evans, in his study of the worksheets of this poem, reprints a short prose outline written by Thomas as well as some unused variants that show that Thomas almost certainly intended the "wild men" to be Romantics. Thomas wrote in prose: "They understand, now they are dying, <u>that impossible love could have been their sun</u>, but that they helped to kill it, and so they rage against its dying" (my italics). This idea that "impossible love" could have enabled them to unite with a nature beyond death is developed in some lines later altered: "All men dying, suffer the same dark sight: / Impossible love that cannot stay" and "All men dying mark in their dark plight / The sun of love was slain on the first day." Other variants of the key line include "Love, flying near to hand, that will not stay" and "Love will have rayed the light their mothers gave." All these lines linking "love" to "sun" seem to say that the wild men were unable to sustain that direct linkage of self to outer world that is the particular grace of childhood. From the moment at birth ("the first day") that "sun" of love was slain.

Evans glosses these variants: "What Thomas is saying is that experience blunts man's original capacity for love . . . Man is born innocent and good, but from the very day of his birth the world seems to corrupt him and destroy in him the power of perfect (i.e., 'impossible') love. It is a theme immediately familiar to anyone who knows Wordsworth and Whitman . . . ; and the wasted opportunities are the occasions when one acted according to the dictates of the world (i.e., the world of rational experience) rather than those of one's own heart, thus stifling the sun of love."[37] In the stanza as finally printed, however, the Romantic "wild men" seem to fail not only because of the world of rational experience but also because their solution to the problem of how to live life was inherently inadequate, a major, if temporary, concession for Thomas to make.

Stanza 5 concerns the "grave men." Glossed as poets, seers, astrologers, they are also <u>all</u> men at the point of death ("grave"). In fact, a manuscript now at the University of Texas has the word "all" as a variant reading for "grave." Linking the wise, good, and wild men of stanzas 2-4, Thomas says that all men near their deaths are granted a moment of vision ("blinding sight" = a vision of things that is "blind" to mere physical actuality; also Thomas's father went blind near his death). Wisdom, morality, and love (st. 2-4) are absorbed into the grave men's final knowledge about living at the point of death: "Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay." Meteors, lights in the sky like the unrealized lightning and unstoppable sun (st. 2,4), and gaiety, like the unrealized dancing in a green bay (st. 3) link all three previous stanzas in a general answer: let the individual face death with Yeatsian tragic gaiety, non-rationally asserting ("rage") his own still living self until the final moment when he experiences death with equal

intensity and even joyous acceptance.

The final stanza directly introduces the poet's father into the poem for the first time. Thomas's father, D. J. Thomas, a first generation member of the middle-class urban community to which he escaped from the farm, was a militant atheist who yet cursed at God for God's foibles, a failed poet who wanted his son to be the poet he never was, a proud and distant English schoolmaster whose greatest virtue was a keen critical intelligence -- this man, now old, blind, dying of cancer that began in the mouth, thus making him unable to speak the language he loved to communicate with his son, is the unsentimentalized object of the poet's disciplined emotional response in this stanza. Like Jacob asking the blessing of the blind and dying Isaac, Thomas asks his blind father on the "sad height" of the point of death to "curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray." The odd prayer to be either cursed or blessed by "fierce" tears returns to the theme of stanza 1: moral rightness as a detachable abstract system is insignificant; only the dark and the night are good or right. Both a curse and a blessing by means of tears, for the father cannot speak, are forms of intense emotional response, not of intellectual or philosophical resignation. Either a curse or a blessing will do as long as the response of self to self is achieved and definable individuality, for one last moment of existence, is assured. The poignancy of the stern old father now crying in his speechless blindness near death is even more moving because of Thomas's own lifelong faith in the power of spoken, poetic language to govern man's perception of nature and relation to others. To be beyond the power of language is to be beyond the human, the redeemable. As Moynihan aptly puts it: "Thomas shows his dread of silence most clearly in 'Do Not Go Gentle . . .' when the inability of his father to speak is

the equivalent of death, nonentity; it is Blake's 'black incessant sky,' the cosmic silence neither defined nor praised."[38] Like Byron's Manfred, Thomas's father can only "rage" against the conditions of existence.

Among Thomas's papers found at his death in 1953 were drafts of a poem on which he was working the year he died, "Elegy" (P 216-17). His last, though unfinished poem, "Elegy" is another, more personal elegy on the death of his father. The only poem, except for "Author's Prologue," on which Thomas worked during 1952-53 when his life was taken up with American reading tours, Under Milk Wood, and personal difficulties, "Elegy" is unique among Thomas's poems in its unconfused balancing of a deeply felt, subjective response to his father's death with a clear-eyed, objective presentation of his father's faults and virtues as a human being. Thomas described "Elegy" to Brinnin in 1953 as a companion poem to "Do Not Go Gentle" (DTA 231), but unlike that highly rhetorical plea that his father resist death, "Elegy" is a true elegy describing the way D. J. actually did die and meditating on his fate. In a note to his reconstruction of this poem after Thomas's death, Vernon Watkins says that the first seventeen lines of terza rima are as Thomas wrote them in the latest extant draft of the poem; the last twenty-three lines are Watkins' assemblage of lines and phrases in various stages of completion from the sixty pages of manuscript drafts. Watkins, too, distinguishes "Elegy" from "Gentle" in his final comment: "It /"Elegy"/ recalls the earlier poem, also written for his father: 'Do not go gentle into that good night'; but it is clear that in this last poem by Dylan Thomas was attempting something even more immediate and more difficult" (CP 182). Written in a severe, spare style, almost shorn of Thomas's usual plethora of images, "Elegy" com-

bines a cold-eyed view of his father, his father's death, his own emotional response, deep but checked, and his belief expressed in In Country Heaven that the individual will enjoy an afterlife in nature, retaining his individuality, united with the landscape and the dead by the power of universal love. This striving to link the personal and the objective without distortions, father and son, human life and afterlife in nature, is appropriately developed in terza rima, Dante's measure for The Divine Comedy, whose interlocking stanzaic rhymes (aba, bcb, cdc, etc.) suggest harmony and a formality capable of both massiveness and subtlety of expression. In the opening stanza Thomas provides a completely objective picture of D. J. Thomas and the manner of his death (blind, speechless from cancer), a picture of the stoic rationalist that he was:

> Too proud to die, broken and blind he died
> The darkest way, and did not turn away,
> A cold kind man brave in his narrow pride
>
> On that darkest day.

Dying on December 16, 1952, D. J. almost died on the shortest day of the year (December 21) to which Thomas seems to move his death ("on that darkest day"), making D. J.'s death a triple darkness: winter solstice, blindness, and death itself. Neither his virtues (kind, unflinching) nor his faults (cold, proud) are exaggerated, omitted, or allowed to distort each other. Stanzas 2-4 form a prayer that follows the poet's moral definition of his father in stanza 1. Thomas apparently sends D. J. to Country Heaven:

> Oh, forever may
> He lie lightly, at last, on the last, crossed
> Hill, under the grass, in love, and there grow
>
> Young among the long flocks.

The hill of the graveyard is not only "crossed" by the Christian cross

planted above the grave of a self-confessed atheist but is also "crossed" by birds, animals, and men whose actions are characters in a holy landscape and thus inevitably ritualistic. D. J.'s afterlife is in nature ("under the grass") yet this is a place of "love," a pastoral existence among the long dead "flocks" of living creatures who have preceded him to Country Heaven. Thomas prays that D. J. will "never lie lost / Or still" for he has passed into Country Heaven where he may retain his individuality though more deeply united now with nature and all "others" by the power of love. As an atheist, D. J. longed for "his mother's breast" which to him was only "rest and dust"; he also yearned for "the darkest justice of death," that sentence executed on all living, for he knew himself "blind and unblessed." In spite of an atheism so intense that it seemed pridefully to suppress a hidden belief in God, Thomas hopes that in death D. J. will be "fathered and found," that he will meet the God of love in nature and will become a child again, finding his mother's breast in mother nature and his father's in the anthropomorphized sun of "In Country Heaven." Stanza 5 and stanza 6 (ll. 1-2), the last stanzas ordered by Thomas, show the poet kneeling by his father's deathbed at the final moment of "noon, and night, and light" (noon = the "sad height" of the instant of insight just prior to death). Like rivers, the veins in his father's hands link him to the very act of dying to the dead and to nature to which his life is flowing:

> The rivers of the dead
> Veined his poor hand I held, and I saw
> Through his unseeing eyes to the roots of the sea.

Stanzas 7-13 and the single line that traditionally completes the terza rima rhyme (xyx y) are ordered by Watkins from Thomas's manuscripts and therefore may not represent the way in which Thomas would have finished the poem, though as discrete particulars the lines suggest certain ideas

that would probably have found some place in the poem. Some lines show Thomas's keen insight into D. J.'s complex religious views and his moral nature:

> Being innocent, he dreaded that he died
> Hating his God, but what he was was plain:
> An old kind man brave in his burning pride.

Other lines develop two parallel ideas: that D. J. has a subjective and objective existence after his death. As he died, unbelieving, it seemed to D. J. that the world died with his fading perception of it: "He cried as he died, fearing at last the spheres' / Last sound, the world going out with a breath." His "two nights" were subjective and objective -- "blindness and death." Just so, his two lights are his afterlife in nature and in his son's memory where he will live as the world lived in his own eyes until he died. Thus, though Thomas saw "the last light glide" from his father's eyes, that light now is part of the larger "light of the lording sky" where the sun-god lives. Conversely, D. J. also lives "in the meadows of his son's eye." Since the son's memory is a "meadow" and since to Thomas God is the country of the spirit and a state of being within, and since in the prose summary to <u>In Country Heaven</u> memory is able to operate in all tenses and is thus an instrument for looking into eternity, it may be that the poet's memory and the father's afterlife in the grass, sea, and skylights of nature, "in love," are one. Both God and Thomas's father seem inhabitants of an individual's mind: "I am not too proud to say that He and he / Will never never go out of my mind." The poem's final line in Watkins' construction makes a similar point: "Until I die he will not leave my side." In both statements, there is a lingering sense that Thomas is still not quite sure whether what he calls God and Country Heaven are distinct from his imaginative perception of them.

The blindness of Thomas's father no doubt encouraged Thomas to include in his final poems some lines about subjective perception versus objective existence. All in all, however, "Elegy" to my mind does not mark a fizzling out of Thomas's poetic talent as some critics claim by comparing "Elegy" to his poems that are almost all more self-centered and filled with images. Though not deviating from his belief in man's ultimate destiny in a loving union with nature, Thomas balances this optimism with an unflinchingly clear portrait of a human being other than himself. More so than in "Do Not Go Gentle" or the earlier elegy "After the Funeral" whose central figure was more the poet than Ann Jones, the father of "Elegy" emerges as Thomas's one fully realized portrait of a complexly "other" human being to which he is linked nevertheless by subjective perception and feeling but without an aggrandizement of his poetic self that would cruelly minimize the real complexity of D. J.'s character and the stern, hopeless stoicism that characterized D. J.'s own despairing view of his extraordinarily painful death.

Excluding "Lament," "Do Not Go Gentle," and "Elegy," which deviate somewhat from Thomas's post-war tendency to set his poems in specific Welsh landscapes whose interpreter he becomes, the major effort of the unfinished In Country Heaven was followed by only two final, finished poems: "Poem on his Birthday" (1951) and "Author's Prologue" (1952). Both poems are attempts to reinforce his view that the poet's true role is as the celebrator of nature, whose poems should link man to landscape by the power of love. In "Author's Prologue," written especially as a prologue to Collected Poems and thus representing a very conscious effort by Thomas to define for his readers his view of his role as a poet, for the achievement of which Collected Poems is the evidence,

Thomas ends his poetic career by confronting one of the great Romantic problems: how to link a concern for political revolution (here, Thomas's fear of nuclear war) with the poet's powers of imaginative perception and the fostering of relationship and love. Written as a sort of summing up of his poetic achievement and concerns from 1934 to 1952, "Author's Prologue," by a twist of fate, came to be rightfully viewed as Thomas's final statement of his most important poetic problems and strategies.

Like "Author's Prologue," Thomas's next to last finished poem, "Poem on his Birthday" (P 208-11), is in part an effort to deal with the ideas that he wished to embody in the structurally demanding In Country Heaven. Like most of his major poems since "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October," this poem is one of Thomas's contributions to the "major lyric" of Romanticism as previously defined by Abrams: a man confronts a landscape set in a specific time (the poet's thirty-fifth birthday in October, 1949) and place (his workshop on the seaside cliff in Laugharne, Wales); beginning with a description of the landscape that includes an awareness of the perceiving poet's participation in that landscape (st. 1-4), the poem moves briefly into the past (st. 5), confronts a particular problem (st. 5-9), and looks toward the future, as Abrams says, having defined "what it means to have suffered and to grow older."[39] Obsessed with writing birthday poems (cf. "Especially When the October Wind," "Twenty Four Years," and "Poem in October"), Thomas found an ideal occasion to link a described landscape to the problem of his personal confrontation of death and the loss of creative power, a problem evoked by his observation of animal behavior in the landscape. Speculating on the nature of "God" and "heaven" as he did in "In Country Heaven," Thomas, in "Poem on his Birthday,"

goes beyond his earlier Laugharne landscape poems in presenting the single, adult consciousness, largely without psychic support from a remembered and re-created childhood vision, and that adult's emotionally distanced preception of the landscape. In spite of the inevitable loss of original, spontaneous response, the poet as adult determinedly exercises his imaginative powers to praise nature and its agent death as holy and good, life as joyful and worthwhile, and the spirit of love as released by the poet as man's last, best hope as he sails toward death. As Frye says, "in many Romantic poems . . . it is suggested that the final identification of and with reality may be or at least include death."[40] Thomas's "Poem on his Birthday" accepts that belief, uniting the mephitic obsessions of the early womb-tomb poems ruled by endless decay and inexorable process with the later poems' new faith in detectable love and natural holiness in the landscape as evidence that death is an agent of transformation into a higher state -- Country Heaven -- a spiritualized nature beyond death and time. Even this resignation and acceptance, however, is not without its undersong of fear, and critics are right who detect in this poem a sense of forced praise, an almost desperateness of affirmative assertion, as if as in the early "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" the poet could abolish the fear of death only by poetic incantations against it. Thomas's surviving prose outline of the poem makes this clear:

> [the poet] celebrates, and spurns, his thirty-fifth birthday . . . Birds and fishes move under and around him on their dying ways, & he, a craftsman in words, toils towards his own wounds which are waiting in ambush for him . . . Now exactly half of his three score and ten years is gone . . . he looks back at his times: his loves, his hates, all he has seen, and sees the logical progress of death in every thing he has seen & done. His death lurks for him, and for all, in the next lunatic war, and still singing, still praising the radiant earth,

> still loving, though remotely, the animal creation also gladly pursuing their inevitable & grievous ends, he goes towards his. Why should he praise God, and the beauty of the world as he moves to horrible death? He does not like the deep zero dark and the nearer he gets to it, the louder he sings, the higher the salmon leaps, the shriller the birds carol. (Ferris 262; Thomas's italics)

This synopsis outlines a somewhat more well-balanced example of the great Romantic lyric than we get in the poem itself. Here, Thomas proposes an opening description of a particular landscape set in time and place; he then proposes a meditation on his past, arising out of the landscape (this section is reduced to a few lines in stanza 5); and thirdly, he proposes to turn to the future and to death by joining nature in an ever-increasingly loud hymn of praise whose intensity seems symptomatic of a final encounter between the pressure of imagination and the pressure of reality in its direct form, death. Bloom's speculation as to whether death is a failure of the imagination comes to mind. Thomas seems, in any case, to be trying to do two things at once: to praise all of nature in a mood of acceptance, yet by that very praise to "rage" on as in "Do Not Go Gentle" and by raging imaginatively to keep his fullest powers in array against the final act that will end them. Another important point made in the synopsis is Thomas's indication that one of his fears is "the next lunatic war" by which he means a nuclear war. As is true but only more so in his final poem "Author's Prologue," so here Thomas, in Romantic fashion, translates political concerns into psychic and poetic terms: the holocaust can only be avoided by man's attaining a vision of love, a vision to which the poet, in the act of poetic creation, gives man access. In "Poem on his Birthday" Thomas despairs of the poet's ability to link politics and poetics; in his final poem, he comes to terms with that problem.

"Poem on his Birthday," though finished in 1951, is set in October, 1949 on the poet's thirty-fifth birthday (October 22). The poem may be divided into three main sections: from his seaside workshop in Laugharne, the poet sees the estuary, Sir John's Hill, and their animal inhabitants all of which he describes in relation to his own presence and ongoing poetic activities (st. 1-4); meditating briefly and dejectedly on his past failures as a poet to release a healing love into the world (st. 5), he ponders the question of the true nature of "God" and "heaven," against the possibility of nuclear destruction of the entire earth and the certainty of his own personal death (st. 6-9); finally (st. 10-12), in three stanzas whose description of an inner/outer voyage parallels the opening four stanzas' description of the inner/outer relation of creating poet and living landscape, the poet and nature (whose things are words as his words are things) both praise as they move toward death, and, in doing so, are transformed from the autumnal to the vernal, from the human to the angelic, symbolizing their assumption, at the point of vision which is the point of death, into Country Heaven.

Stanzas 1-4 (the present): the poet's description of the landscape as seen from his seacliff hut where he is working on this very poem. Describing again the familiar landscape of Laugharne, Thomas interweaves the external action of the estuary and the internal action of writing his birthday poem. As in "Poem in October" and "Over Sir John's Hill," the herons emerge more fully from the landscape than the other creatures, and they end each of the first three stanzas by linking the unconscious actions of the other animals with the entirely self-conscious actions and beliefs of the poet himself. Genii loci, their sarcedotal actions more darkly than ever foretell the poet's impending death as they themselves have evolved from entirely happy

symbols of sacramentalism in "Poem in October" ("the heron-priested shore") to the ambiguous symbols of "Over Sir John's Hill" where they seem to know more than they tell, to their final development in this poem. Describing the frequently enjambed, variously lengthened and "spiralling stanzas" of the poem as "hewn coils," the poet, as in "Over Sir John's Hill," is something of the same gravestone-hewing Romantic lapidary who memorializes landscapes. Stanza 1 presents us with a fiercely active landscape. Governed by a "mustardseed sun" (mustardseed = faith, heaven in Christian parables), Thomas's landscape seems watched over by the sun who is god in "In Country Heaven." The violent, up and down "switchback" sea and "full tilt" river are matched by wave-skimming cormorants and "palavers of birds." The wordy birds coalesce with the wordy poet who is spending his birthday writing a poem. Both happy and sad that he has made it to thirty-five, he "celebrates and spurns" the day while the fishing herons "spire and spear" in a matching action, being tall and thin like a cathedral spire yet still killing fish as time kills the poet. Even the description (accurate) of Thomas's cliffside hut or "his house on stilts" makes the house heron-like. Both the house and the poet are "high among beaks" for birds fly about them and the poet is a beaked bird as well, singing his poem. In fact, as he calls himself in stanza 2 "the rhymer in the long tongued room," the house on stilts is also the body of the poet himself, a triple identity of house/poet's head/heron that links poetic creation to outer landscape by metaphor. Stanza 2 widens the description of the landscape to include a great variety of animals, especially birds. All these animals, excepting the priestly heron, are free from the poet's estranging self-consciousness, for they are directed by their instincts -- "doing what they are told" -- yet like the poet

working on his poems they too are "working at their ways to death." Still, the "congered waves" are full of eels (congers) and are also magically "conjured" by the primary imagination that caused creation. As in Hart Crane's "The Broken Tower" and in Thomas's broadcast "Wilfred Owen," the poet here is depicted as a ringer in the belltower of the doomed self:

> And the rhymer in the long tongued room,
> Who tolls his birthday bell,
> Toils towards the ambush of his wounds;
> Herons, steeple stemmed, bless.

A "rhymer" who rhymes inner poetic process and outer landscape, the poet works in a hut that is like a bell, has a head like a bell whose tongue is the poet's own, and rings his bell to begin the morning service of the self and nature at which the heron, whose "steeple" legs (one raised" match the poet's belltower self, will preside as priest. Poetic "toil" or imaginative perception allows the poet to see the heron as a fellow celebrant. The poet's "wounds" that will ambush him at his death recall Thomas's frequent identifications of himself as poet-redeemer with Christ, though here his power seems to ebb. Stanzas 3-4 seem to distinguish between rational and imaginative perception of the same landscape. Stanza 3 begins with a description of disturbing carnivorous activity in nature -- hawks killing finches, otters eating fish. These actions match the poet's state of mind as he "sings toward anguish." Then, in the "slant, racking house" of hut and bent-over body of the poet working like a stone-cutter at the "hewn coils of his trade," the poet, we are told, "perceives" the holistic actions of the herons who "walk in their shrouds" like priests or the dead (the living dead of Country Heaven whose emissaries the herons are?) and even now the minnows, who, in the "robe" of the priestly river, are "wreathing around

their prayer." The syntax of these lines reads:

He . . .
. . . . . .
/ in / . . . his trade perceives,

a construction that confirms that the imaginative action of poetic composition is what yields this insight into heron, river, minnows. Yet this vision is balanced by the ordinary consciousness of the poet, his knowledge that he is "far at sea" and writing troubled poems under a "serpent cloud" of doubt and adult estrangement that makes up the poem's serpent-like "coils" which he orders by art. This troubling cloud seems to darken the landscape again, where the poet now sees dolphins and seals killing and being killed with savage joy ("blood / Slides good in the sleek mouth").

Against this present landscape infused with holiness and death, the poet turns briefly to his own past (st. 5). An extraordinary stanza, stanza 5 is a farewell to the poet's early poetic self, the self apotheosized in the Altarwise sonnets as the cosmic Christ-redeemer who would become one with a humanized universe, the Universal Man of Blake. In the "cavernous" sea of nature and the self (cf. stanza 10: "the sea that hides his secret selves"), the poet listens as the "wept white angelus kneels." The angelus, a Catholic ritual, is a thrice daily summoning to prayer in honor of the incarnation of the Christ child. By this angelus, which sounds out of the waves, is the poet's finally drowned child self upon whose experiences he had drawn so long. Still uniting outer landscape and inner poetic process, the poet describes in terms of a sea voyage the loss of the ability to release healing love into the world. The angelus bell of the dead child self rings out his thirty-five years: "On skull and scar where his loves lie wrecked / Steered by the falling stars." These "falling stars" may be symbols of his own

childhood vision, as in "In Country Sleep" where he addressed his infant daughter, telling her that the Thief has come every night "since the falling star you were born" (P 199). Also, the image means that with the loss of visionary love and what he means by "faith" his vision of unfallen nature now falls into the present landscape of carnivorous activity like a falling star into oblivion. Thinking of the "terror" of nuclear war that he mentioned in the prose synopsis, Thomas agonizes over the impending victory of the forces of destruction over the love that he does not have time or possibly now the ability to release as a counterforce:

> And to-morrow weeps in a blind cage
> Terror will rage apart
> Before chains break to a hammer flame
> And love unbolts the dark.

It has been suggested that this blind cage derives from the epigraph affixed to The Waste Land concerning the Sibyl of Cumae, an Eliotic symbol of the terrible burden of consciousness. Also, the hammer, chain, flames, and love as a revealing power have been linked to Blake, especially "Tyger, Tyger" whose powerful figure of imagination is conjectured to be the product of a blacksmith artist.[41] In "Author's Prologue" Thomas directly adopts the figure of the artist as blacksmith, probably modelled on Blake's Los, and in the present poem does so as well. Also, the idea of life as a caged or bolted room may owe something to Wordsworth's "prison-house" image for the gradual departure from childhood vision in the Intimations Ode. This stanza-length "dejection ode" in Thomas's poem leads from a yielding up of hope that imagination and love can prevent the oncoming holocaust to a speculation (st. 6-9) about the nature of the God and heaven to which the aging poet assumes he is going. Stanza 6 contains purposefully ambiguous

statements about God and heaven: "the unknown, famous light of great / And fabulous, dear God" and "Heaven that never was / Nor will be ever is always true." These lines could mean several things: (1) the Christian idea of heaven and God is false though God and heaven exist; (2) God and heaven exist as human concepts but not in fact; or (3) God and heaven are psychic events, matters of right imaginative perception and as such are unknown and non-existent to those who lack vision but famous, dear, eternal to those who attain psychic unity, union with the landscape, see life as sacrament, and come to understand death as simply the passageway to Country Heaven, for "dark is a way but light is a place." More clearly, at the end of stanza 6 and throughout stanza 7, Thomas explains heaven in images that make it clear that heaven is Country Heaven, a pastoral life without death. In the "brambled void" of heaven as a berry patch, where "plenty as blackberries in the woods / The dead grow for His joy." This heaven seems more filled with the sounds of dead animals than the souls of men, for in Thomas's heaven, all living things having had souls, all things are admitted to heaven. He speculates that he "might" (if heaven is really true) wander in Country Heaven with all the animal "spirits of the horseshoe bay" such as the "stars' seashore dead" -- the starfish. Eagles, whales, geese, after death, join in the almost exclusively animal host which praises God in all his forms (that he is "unborn" and a "ghost" keeps up Thomas's ambiguity about God's real existence). As each animal is a priest, "gulled and chanter in young Heaven's fold." Though becoming a gull, "gulled," he may be fooled, and by becoming a chanter, he not only becomes an <u>enchanter</u> who conjurs up this very heaven but the "chanter" which is a word for the <u>hedge-sparrow</u>, appropriate word for an inhabitant of Country Heaven

along with the heavenly hedgerow men of the prose summary of In Country Heaven. Against this imagined pastoral heaven, stanza 8 begins with a run-over line from stanza 7 that stops us short: "But dark is a long way." Locked in the burden of consciousness "on the earth of the night," Thomas faces the "rocketing wind" of atomic rockets that could blow bones out of a hill, scythe down boulders like grass, and blow the sea apart. In this terrible fear, he

> prays
> . . . . . .
> Faithlessly to Him
>
> Who is the light of old
> And air shaped Heaven where souls grow wild
> As horses in the foam.

Another intentional ambiguity, these lines seem to indicate that Thomas believes yet also disbelieves in God. Heaven is "air shaped," created by the imagination manifested in the poet's airy breath, a state of being or country of the spirit. Earlier a blackberry patch, now heaven is a seashore whose souls are "horses," Thomas's symbol of Edenic innocence and creative power. Heaven is a place where souls can be "wild," natural, a wooded seashore area just like the estuary and its adjacent Sir John's Hill that Thomas is presently observing. Unable to formulate a God and Heaven without ambiguity or hesitancy, Thomas turns back to what he knows is real and loves the most: the present landscape. Stanza 9 prepares us for the final section of the poem in the poet's decision both to "mourn" and to "count my blessings aloud," the "celebrate and spurn" of stanza 1 and the curse/bless opposition of "Do Not Go Gentle" being parallel instances of Thomas's ongoing progression by contraries. Invoking the sacred herons one final time ("the shrined / And druid herons' vows"), the poet picks up from stanza 5 the idea of a sea voyage ("the voyage to ruin I must run"). His childhood vision is gone -- "Dawn

ships clouted aground" -- yet in stanzas 10-12 what remains to him of natural joy he ebulliently catalogues and what he can still do as a poet he does, though his central hope of transforming the world by the powers of imagination and love seems doomed now.

Some of these "blessings" are easier to formulate than others. The first is "four elements," the classical four elements that, in making up the world and man, link the two together. In "In Country Sleep," the poet-father describes nature in its visionary form as "music and elements that a miracle makes! / Earth, air, water fire singing into the white act." In the fragmentary "In Country Heaven," the "fifth element" is "pity for death," omitted here by the still living poet who lacks the larger perspective of the sun-god of the earlier poem. The second blessing, "five / Senses," is one that, like the four elements, links the single self to the natural world. In the earlier poem "When All My Five and Country Senses See," the senses were the avenues through which the poet's love flowed into the world. This fact led to the third blessing, the definition of man as "a spirit in love" destined to live not in the "spun slime" of adult self-consciousness of death and decay but in a triple home. The first is the "nimbus bell cool kingdom come" of Country Heaven. The second is the "lost, moonshine domes" which echo any of the famous domes of Shelley, Coleridge, and Yeats and which here stands for the full assumption of the afterlife of imagination, the entry of the poet, after death, into unending imaginative perception of the universe. These lost, moonshine domes also recall Coleridge's famous "moon gloss" on line 263f. in The Ancient Mariner. Since the poet was compared earlier to a bell and since a "nimbus" can be a halo, the "kingdom come" of line 4 of this stanza may be the kingdom of imaginative life in which the poet is the

ruling lord living in a city of moonlit domes. The third goal of the voyaging "spirit in love" is "the sea that hides his secret selves." The psychic sea of an inner voyage as well as the outer sea of nature, this image continues the linkage between complex mental action and a participating outer landscape made one with it by polysemous metaphors such as this. The fourth, final, and most important blessing occupies the poem's final two stanzas. The poet is able to understand that, in spite of his darker perceptions of nature infested with death and time, nature is actually a continuous act of celebration and praise. Thus, the "closer I move / To death," the poet says, "the louder the sun blooms / And the . . . sea exults." In fact, the "whole world," which was "said" by God and is thus a word as well as a thing, "spins its morning of praise" in "triumphant faith." Nearness to death is paralleled, then, by the poet's increasing ability to see beyond the limits of adult perception. At the very end, earth shades into Country Heaven so that death may finally be understood as an epiphanic moment when the landscape changes from the state of "earth" to the state of "Country Heaven." In the final stanza this idea is made clear. Set in the autumn in honor of the poet's October birthday, the poem began with a fall landscape. Nearing his death, however, the poet can

> hear the bounding hills
> Grow larked and greener at berry brown
> Fall.

Suddenly in the landscape it is "thunderclap spring" full of "dew larks" and the islands in the sea that a minute ago were inhabited by men -- "the mansouled fiery islands" -- are now "spanned with angels" for the poet now sees that men <u>were</u> angels and that nature <u>is</u> eternal spring and joy, if only rightly perceived. These angel-men themselves now have "holier . . . eyes," granted by the poet's vision and his embodiment of

it in this poem, in order to see themselves as they really are. Having left this vision behind him, he can do no more, but he is comforted by the fact that these angelic "shining men" will be "no more alone" but empowered by his recorded vision of them "as I sail out to die." As the hills of Laugharne change into the hills of Country Heaven, the poet prepares to endure his sea change into one of the heavenly hedgerow men of the eternal landscape. After this, only one final completed poem remained to be written, the "Author's Prologue" to Collected Poems. Set in the same landscape as "Poem on his Birthday" (the poet's view of the landscape from his workshop window where he sat writing these poems), the "Prologue" addresses the question raised in stanza 5 of the birthday poem: how effective, really, can the poet's imagination be in releasing a love into the world powerful enough and effective enough to repel, neutralize, or transform the new and terrible threat against man and nature -- atomic war?

"Author's Prologue" (P 3-5) has two origins. First, Thomas was asked in 1951 to prepare a prose introduction to his forthcoming Collected Poems: 1934-52. Having told his literary agent David Higham that he had "no interest whatsoever" in writing a prose introduction (Ferris 278), Thomas was persuaded by his friend Rayner Heppenstall to write a verse prologue. Heppenstall recalled: "Dylan was fussed by the fact that five pages had been left blank for a preface, which he now had to write. He did not want to write a preface. I suggested to him doing a preface in verse and even tried to persuade him to go and sit in Regent's Park and do it at once. To fill five pages, it would, he pointed out, have to be a terribly long poem. I recommended short lines."[42] Written in rhymed syllabics, the poem never exceeds eight syllables per line, and few lines are that long. In addition to filling the requirements for a preface,

"Author's Prologue" actually began as a humorous verse letter to be sent by Thomas to Brinnin, his American agent, who had just steered him through one of the famous reading tours. Brinnin himself records Thomas's comment to this effect (DTA 131) and notes that Thomas's answer as to why the letter was never sent was "I just kept the idea and some of the images and went on with the poem instead." Ferris quotes from an as yet unpublished letter from Thomas to Oscar Williams, the American poetry anthologist, in which Thomas explains that "Author's Prologue was "going to be a piece of doggerel written to someone in the States on my return from there to Wales, but soon grew involved and eventually serious" (Ferris 278). In the Dylan Thomas Collection at Texas there are some lines from an early version of the poem that suggest its original, light-hearted nature:

> This leaky ship of ink
> And poppycock and love
> Across the painted drink
> With a ballpoint I shove.

Towards the end of these lines, the tone changes and Thomas's theme of the imagination's power over death and destruction arises: "Nothing is simple. He / Dies. Sing & deny" (Texas, Works: Q-Z). Letters by Thomas concerning the "Prologue" confirm that the letter to Brinnin grew into a conscious, and as it turned out a final, statement on the poet's themes of imaginative power, love, nature, the role of the poet, and the threat of atomic war. To David Higham Thomas described the poem as a poetic manifesto: "And now I have to confess that I can't write an ordinary prose-preface after all, having no interest whatsoever in it. What I am doing, and doing quickly, is writing a Prologue in verse, but (fairly) straightforward and colloquial, addressed to the (may be) readers of the Collected Poems and full (I hope) of references

to my methods, my aims, and the kind of poetry I want to write" (SL 373). As it happened, the poem took a year to write (160 MSS. pages survive). Although correctly describing the poem to Oscar Williams (to whom he wished to sell it) as "a complete poem by itself, not just something written especially for a collected volume" (SL 379), he more accurately described the poem to E. P. Bozman, his editor at Dent, as a true prologue with a fantastic rhyme scheme:

> I intended, as you know, to write a more-or-less straight-forward & intimate prose preface, and then funked it. And then I began to write a prologue in verse, which has taken the devil of a time to finish. Here it is, only a hundred & two lines, and pathetically little, in size & quality, to warrant two months, & more, I've taken over it. To begin with, I set myself, foolishly perhaps, a most difficult technical task: The Prologue is in two verses -- in my manuscript, a verse to a page -- of 51 lines each. And the second verse rhymes backward with the first. The first & last lines of the poem rhyme: the second and the last but one; & so on & so on. Why I acrosticked myself like this, don't ask me.
>
> I hope the Prologue does read as a Prologue, & not as just another poem. I think -- though I am too near to it now to be any judge -- that it does do what it sets out to do: addresses the readers, the 'strangers', with a flourish, and fanfare, and makes clear, or tries to make clear, the position of one writer in a world 'at poor peace'. (SL 376-77)

This statement makes the underlying political concern of the poem clear. The final conflict between the forces of imagination and love and the forces of destruction and death, an almost Freudian order of battle, was about to begin.

As Thomas explains, the rhyme scheme of the poem is extraordinary: . . . edcbaabcde . . . or a fanning out from a central couplet at the poem's exact middle of matching rhymes that end with the first and the final lines of the poem rhyming. Although he expresses astonishment at the difficulty of the scheme, Thomas was disappointed when Louis MacNeice, who had a fine ear, upon hearing the poem failed to catch its rhyme scheme

(Life 381). Still, the rigid structure helped discipline Thomas as he said elsewhere: "it /the rhyme scheme/ may be a waste of time for the critic, but not for the poet" (Ferris 119). Critical commentary on the rhyme scheme involves a second important element of the poem: Thomas's adoption of the persona of Noah building arks of love poems to float on the molten flood of human fear and nuclear holocaust. A type of Christ, Noah is a saviour as is the poet whose poems will save the natural world against human destruction. The rhyme scheme, swinging on its hinge at the central couplet (ll. 51-52), may thus be seen as an imitation of the planks of Noah's ark laid parallel bow to stern or as Noah's opened arms welcoming the animals aboard the ark.[43]

Thomas's final appearance as poet in the guise of drunken Noah ("the moonshine / Drinking Noah of the bay") sailing his ark of poems on unfriendly seas fits in with a traditional Romantic symbol of the bateau ivre. In "The Romantic Myth" Frye remarks that a "pessimistic Romantic" poet will "create an ark or bateau ivre carrying the cargo of human values and tossing on a stormy and threatening sea." Especially prominent in the later nineteenth-century poets, this symbol, Frye says in another essay, is part of the Modernist inheritance from Romanticism: "the major constructs which our own culture has inherited from its Romantic ancestry are also of the 'drunken boat' shape, but represent a later and a different conception of it . . . Here the poet is usually in the position of Noah's ark, a fragile container of sensitive and imaginative values threatened by a chaotic and unconscious power below it . . . In some versions of the construct the antithesis of the symbol of consciousness and the destructive element in which it is immersed can be overcome or transcended: there is an Atlantis under the sea which becomes an Ararat for the beleaguered boat to rest on."[44] In Thomas's

version, however, the arks are not at all fragile, their cargo is nature itself, and the threatening waters on which the boat sails are defeated in battle and transformed into a fertile, flowering pasture of the sea. In fact, the victory of love, imagination, and nature over all forces of destruction, especially the dark products of human rationalism (nuclear bombs) is complete.

The first half of "Author's Prologue" (ll. 1-51) may be divided into several smaller sections: an opening description of the seaside below Thomas's workshop window in Laugharne (ll. 1-17); a contrasting description of the great cities of the world that the poet imagines will be gutted by nuclear firestorms (ll. 18-22); a meditation on the nature of poetic creation in light of these two descriptions (ll. 23-43); and finally, a description of a terrible molten flood that is flowing westward from London towards Wales where the poet as Noah is building his ark-poems against the coming flood. The contrasting descriptions of a rural landscape and great urban centers make clear Thomas's view that essential human experience occurs in the country, not the city. Beginning at early dusk, Thomas describes a landscape in which sea and shore, fire and water, man and nature, heaven and earth are happily united. The day is "winding down" like a gyre, at the end of summer (August, 1952, when Thomas was completing this poem), "God speeded" by the divine spirit that permeates the natural world. As in the other post-war landscape poems, Thomas describes an actual landscape and sets it in a particular time (August, 1952) and place (Laugharne, Wales). The "seashaken house / On a breakneck of rocks" is Thomas's now familiar cliffside workshop, the poor man's answer to Yeats's tower. Above, is a "torrent salmon sun," an image uniting sky and sea, fire and water, for, like a salmon, the sun rides its own

watery torrents of light to its submergence in the sea. The "starfish sands," whose "star" and "fish" match the "sun" and "salmon" of the earlier image, create the impression of a world of ordered, matched, even startlingly neighboring regions. If there is a fish in the sun and stars in the sand, there are also "geese nearly in heaven," for heaven is always near a pastoral landscape, only a moment of more intense perception away. Pan, a nature deity, is present in "a wood's dancing hoof" (Sir John's Hill), while the poet, though human, is "tangled" by his perceiving senses with the natural life outside his window -- "chirrup and fruit, / Froth, flute, fin and quill." The Pan-like woods are full of birds, Pan's flute, while the birds' feathers and the poet's writing "quill" are "tangled" in a single word that foreshadows his later comparison of poetic creativity to birds. On the seashore, the sacred, the human, and the natural are united in images of the "fishwife cross / Gulls" -- gulls that cross over fish/wives and who are cross as fishwives -- and, more importantly, the fishermen themselves "Tackled with clouds, who kneel / To the sunset nets." Like the "tangled" poet, the "tackled" fishermen perform a religious act of homage to the setting sun whose rays are a net of light entangled with the fishermen's own nets, from the poet's perspective, while the men themselves are tackled or outfitted with the clouds that form a backdrop to their ritual actions. The sanctity of natural order is thus unconsciously affirmed by the fishermen's entirely natural yet entirely ritualistic pose. Man and nature are further united in the images of boys and herons both "stabbing" for fish and the shells, that, like sailors, "speak seven seas." Against this description of an ordered, holy landscape in which the visual movement is vertical (sun to sea) in order to stress its sacramental quality, the

description of the great cities that threaten the landscape is short but disturbing:

> Eternal waters away
> From the city of nine
> Days' night whose towers will catch
> In the religious wind
> Like stalks of tall dry straw.

Like the burning towers of Troy, London and other cities are burning in the "religious wind" of ideological warfare or else the apocalypse upon which nuclear war is a grotesque variation. Unlike the vertical movement of the sun-to-sea of the opening description, these urban verticals (towers) are sterile (dry straw). Unlike the pastoral world at Laugharne where fire and water interact harmoniously, the cities are all on fire. The poet sees himself as separated, luckily, from the burning cities by the "eternal waters" of the sea by which he lives, waters both of nature and of creative action whose eternality will be demonstrated later in the poem.[45] This distant sighting of the burning cities causes the poet to say to his unknown readers, "at poor peace I sing / To you strangers." Thereafter, he describes the process of creating a poem, which is an act of imaginative fire quite unlike the fire that burns down cities:

> (though song/
> Is a burning and crested act,
> The fire of birds in the world's turning wood,
> For my sawn, splay sounds).

In other words, the poet is disturbed, but his fears are somewhat allayed ("though") by the powerful weapon of poetry which he possesses. This imaginative fire exists in the poet and his song without consuming either. It is also the fire of the phoenix which is reborn out of its own ashes. The poetry made from the "fire of birds" is also "seathumbed," a poetry organically conceived and linked to the elements of water and fire that

dominated the ordered landscape of sun and sea in the poem's opening lines and that re-appear in the description of earth as "this star, bird / Roared, sea born" that follows. Being Noah building his ark, the poet makes his fiery and watery poems into the sturdy objects of craft, "sawn, splayed," like planks cut or split to fit the ark. Still, like all natural things, the "seathumbed leaves" will die "like leaves of trees" and fall into the "dogdayed night" of this present month of August, ruled by the Dog Star, just as the salmon sun "seaward . . . slips" into dusk. Supported by the actions of the swans, who, though "dumb" because not ready yet to sing their death songs pass along the dusky bay till it is "blue," the color of imagination, the poet will "hack / This rumpus of shapes" in the act of poetic creation, because, as a "spinning man," a creator, he will "glory also" (along with birds, sea, and sun) the earth -- "this star" -- which was "sea born" once and will be again as the poet effects its regeneration out of the molten waters of destruction. A builder of arks must be a blacksmith as well, like Blake's Los, so the poet tells us he is building "my bellowing ark" with the blacksmith bellows of his fiery voice. The purpose in building the ark of poems whose wood comes from the phoenix-filled woods is made clear: the poet will build "to the best of my love," for love is a power coterminous with imaginative "ability." Against that love comes its greatest enemy -- the Flood -- not of water merely but of human fear that expresses itself in nuclear warfare whose molten floods of fire sweep from the great cities towards Wales and the Noah-poet:

> the flood begins
> Out of the fountainhead
> Of fear, rage red, manalive,
> Molten and mountainous to stream
> Over the wound asleep
> Sheep white hollow farms
>
> To Wales in my arms.

Unlike the opening description of the Welsh landscape, this threatening flood is a horizontal movement, a diabolical union of the fire and water that existed peacefully and fruitfully in the earlier twilight seascape. The flood of fear is "manalive" because it is created by man and because men float in it, victims of their own folly. Farms are "hollow" because empty of their inhabitants who are fleeing before the flood. Like a mother holding her child, the poet as Noah holds Wales in his arms at the exact, rhyming center of the poem, the point at which the internecine horizontal movements of sailing arks and cresting flood meet in final battle. Unfolding from the center of the poem like a flower, the rhymes rippling out on either side of the single central couplet create an aural rainbow that matches the rainbow image which closes the poem with a new covenant between Noah and the God of and in nature.

The first half of "Author's Prologue" presents a description of the natural world, its nemesis the great cities of the world destroyed by atomic war, the poet's organic, naturalistic method of composition, his poetic aims that make him a Noah, a saviour of the natural world by releasing redemptive love, and the Noah-poet's preparation to face the final flood of fear that denies love, imaginative action, and which threatens nature itself. The second half of the poem (numbered inversely ll. 51-1) presents the poet's call to the members of the animal world to get aboard his ark, a second meditation on the poet's methods of composition, and the final triumph of man and nature over destruction.

Thomas calls all the animals of his world into the ark of love. He calls to the animals in their own language -- "Hoo, "Huloo," "Ho," and "Hist." This calling to "king singsong owls" and others echoes

Wordsworth's description in The Prelude, V, 373-79 of a similar communion with the owls in their natural tongue. The boy, Wordsworth says

> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
> That they might answer him: and they would shout
> Across the watery vale, and shout again
> Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
> And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud.

In Thomas, all these answering animals resemble human types: there is the "king" owl who lives in the castle, the maidenly ring dove, the "reverent" (and Reverend") ministerial rook, the rakish "jack / Whisking hare," and the outlaw "animals thick as thieves." God himself is addressed in his immanence in the natural world -- "Hail to His Beasthood" -- just as earlier, as the sun, God "speeded" the summer on in his own diurnal cycling. This fusion of animal, divine, and human in a single "kingdom" of neighbors means that man's best hope of salvation from his own darkness is in the re-establishment of ties of love with the natural-supernatural world, a linkage effected by the poet's creation of arks of love and the important recognition of the final dependence of human life on its roots in nature. That the "clan" of birds is "agape" may mean that agape or a love feast requires their active participation as well as the poet's. As in the first half of the poem, the poet again pauses to describe his particular sort of poetic composition. As blacksmith-artist he must "hew and smite / A clash of anvils" to make his sturdy poems. At the same time, these poems are organically conceived, a union of the human and the natural in the image of a "tongued puffball" whose spores of love the poet's breath will blow over the flood of fear in which they will fall and flower. And since a poem is also an ark here, the poet's imperative cry "Multitudes of arks!" (a cry of imaginative enactment that causes these arks to appear on the flood) may be looked upon as a dissemination

of the multiple spores of the puffball. (One recalls God's command in Genesis 9:1: "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth").

As the poet calls the animals into his finished ark, the animals themselves sense the impending danger. The gulls fly "with woe / In your beaks" and "barnroofs cockcrow war!" The destructive horizontal movement of the flood engulfs the vertical structures of the valley: the "hogsback woods," the "haystacked / Hollow farms," and all steeples of the engulfed churches whose bells "noise / Poor peace" below the flood. Then, near the end of the poem, at the most crucial moment of confrontation between the forces of life and death, the arked poet and the animals defeat the flood by riding its waves in a counter-moving imaginative apocalypse of love:

> We will ride out alone, and then
> Under the stars of Wales
> Cry, Multitudes of arks! Across
> The water lidded lands,
> Manned with their loves, they'll move,
> Like wooden islands, hill to hill.

By crying out like God that more arks should "be," the poet causes the arks to appear, secondary imagination seeming to elevate itself to the status of primary imagination. The horizontal movement of the arks into the heart of the flood signals the end of the flood/ark conflict in the poem. Unlike the biblical flood, this flood never does totally engulf the highest hills -- Thomas's tribute to nature's deep resistance. The sacramentally vertical lines of the pastoral world begin to re-assert themselves at the very moment that "the moonshine / Drinking Noah of the bay" feels the first splash of the flood against his ark. In addition to the beer that Thomas called "bottled God," this moon-shine is the power of imagination that guides the bateau ivre. The one ark becomes a multitude of arks under the "stars" whose lights

have broken through the dark to fertilize the flood. Each ark is "manned with their loves," animals whose human traits noted above qualify them to "man" an ark of love that unites the human and the natural. Finally, having brought relationship and love successfully, having saved the natural world by the power of imagination, the poet as Noah rides triumphantly as the sun that set when the flood appeared rises to a new, glad day:

> My ark sings in the sun
> At God speeded summer's end
> And the flood flowers now.

The sun shines over the ark into the stilled flood water, transforming the rage and fear of humanity into flowers. The fire and water images that signalled first natural order and then manmade deathliness now again coalesce fruitfully and peacefully in the poem's consummate flowering flood. The sailing arks are flowers on the flood because they are also seeds of wind-blown puffballs. The flowering flood is also, of course, all the poems of Collected Poems. Poetry, nature, and love -- the flood is inseminated by the beams of the sun and "flowers" into a new creation of life of earth. Finally, the rainbow, symbol of a divine convenant with an earlier Noah, is also the flower of the flood.

A complete integration of Thomas's Romantic concerns that have been the focus of this study, "Author's Prologue" presents to us a landscape in whose events we can see the projection of Thomas's complete inner poetic life: the endless struggle of the self to find its place in the landscape without being annihilated by absorption into it; the linkage of inner poetic process and events in the external, natural world; the linkage of "word" and "thing" both in nature and man as not ontologically dissimilar; the fostering of love by imaginative action

as the poet's way of deeply communing with all that is outside the self; the poet's assumption of the role of Christ-like saviour, first of himself, and, in his latest poets, of the natural world threatened by the dark products of scientific rationalism and the anti-natural "cities of nine / Days' night"; and even that most difficult of Romantic concerns, the integration of poetic creation with revolutionary political action. Though he died in 1953, Thomas is still very much a part of our immediate world in his understanding that unless poetry could usefully address the problem of nuclear war, then not only would poetry lose what little of its importance is still generally recognized in the public world, but no arms-control agreement could postpone forever an inevitable holocaust whose deepest causes would lie in human nature's immunity to the spirit of love and its incapacity for perceiving holiness in nature and in the corresponding human art of poetic creation. Without such feelings and perceptions, no program for survival is ultimately feasible. "Author's Prologue," Thomas's last finished and in some ways most important poem, calls for a difficult but crucial change in man's relation to nature, to the power of love, and to the poet as the purveyor of that imaginative power that links the self and the world. "Author's Prologue" is the final flowering of Thomas's Romantic art.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1]There may be some confusion among these names. "In Country Heaven" is a fragmentary framing poem. In Country Heaven is the long, unfinished poem of which "In Country Sleep," "Over Sir John's Hill," and "In the White Giant's Thigh" are poem-sections. In Country Sleep is the 1952 collection of poems that included the three poem-sections of In Country Heaven as well as "Lament," "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," and "Poem on his Birthday."

[2]Dylan Thomas: In Country Heaven -- The Evolution of a Poem, Caedmon T C 1281 (1971), side 1, band 4, section e.

[3]I am examining these three poems in the order of composition: "In Country Sleep" (1947), "Over Sir John's Hill" (1949), and "In the White Giant's Thigh" (1950). Thomas read them in a different order in the "Three Poems" broadcast: "Sleep," "Sir John," and "White Giant." Collected Poems separates "Sir John" and "White Giant" by two poems outside the framing poem "In Country Heaven." Recently, in a paperback reissuing of Collected Poems by Thomas's publishers (London: Everyman / Dent /, 1977) the order is again changed: "Sir John," three intervenign poems, then "White Giant" and "Sleep." No explanation for these changes is known.

[4]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas, p. 79.

[5]Texas and Caedmon, side 1, contain these variants.

[6]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 271.

[7]Moynihan, "Biblical Rhythm," p. 645.

[8]Korg, pp. 125-26.

[9]Walford Davies, New Critical Essays, p. 160.

[10]Korg, p. 125.

[11]Adix in Tedlock, pp. 64-65.

[12]Maud, Entrances, pp. 115-16.

[13]Ackerman, p. 141.

[14]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Open University), p. 34.

[15]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas (Open University), p. 35; Maud, Entrances, p. 107.

[16]Olson, pp. 57-58.

[17]Brian John, "Dylan Thomas's 'Over Sir John's Hill'," Anglo-Welsh Review, 23 (Spring, 1974), 17-24.

[18]Walford Davies, Dylan Thomas, pp. 80-81; John, pp. 19-20.

[19]John, pp. 18-24.

[20]Hartman, Beyond Formalism, p. 223.

[21]John Davenport, "Dylan Thomas," Twentieth Century, 153 (February, 1953), 144; Ralph Maud, "Obsolete and Dialect Words as Serious Puns in Dylan Thomas," English Studies, 49 (February, 1960), 28-30.

[22]Marlene Chambers, "Thomas' 'In the White Giant's Thigh'," The Explicator, 31 (January, 1973), Item 34.

[23]Robert Singleton, "Thomas' In the White Giant's Thigh'," The Explicator, 31 (January, 1973), Item 34.

[24]Louise Murdy, Sound and Sense in Dylan Thomas's Poetry (The Hague: Mouton, 1966) p. 95.

[25]Walford Davies, "An Allusion to Hardy's 'A Broken Appointment' in Dylan Thomas's 'In Country Sleep'," Notes and Queries, N.S., 15 (February, 1968), 61-62; Davies, New Critical Essays, pp. 159-60.

[26]James E. Miller, "Whitman and Thomas: The Yawp and the Gab" in English Institute Essays (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1962), p. 148.

[27]Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, p. 407.

[28]Oliver Evans, "The Making of a Poem (II): Dylan Thomas' 'Lament'," English Miscellany, No. 7 (1956), 241-42.

[29]Gregory Bentley, "Dylan Thomas in Arcadia: the Pan Motif in the Collected Poems," Anglo-Welsh Review, No. 64 (1970), 99.

[30]Kohak, p. 149.

[31]R. B. Kershner, Dylan Thomas: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976), pp. 229-30.

[32]Hall, p. 10.

[33]Stanford, p. 117.

[34]Richard Poole, "Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes and Byron: Two Instances of Indebtedness," Anglo-Welsh Review, 24 (Spring, 1975), 119-20; Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 187.

[35]Horace Gregory, rev. of Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas, ed. FitzGibbon, New York Times Book Review, 25 June 1967, p. 28; Michael

Murphy, "Thomas' 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night'," The Explicator, 28 (February, 1970), Item 55.

[36]Stuart Holroyd, Emergence from Chaos (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), excerpts rpt. in Casebook, ed. Brinnin, p. 146.

[37]Oliver Evans, "The Making of a Poem: Dylan Thomas' 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night'," English Miscellany, No. 6 (1955), 165-67.

[38]Moynihan, Craft and Art, p. 295.

[39]Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 123.

[40]Frye, "The Drunken Boat" in Romanticism Reconsidered, pp. 21-22.

[41]Kidder, p. 200; Hardesty, p. 154f.; Tindall (RG 287).

[42]Rayner Heppenstall, My Bit of Dylan Thomas (no pagination: privately printed, 80 copies). I examined the copy in the British Library at the British Museum.

[43]Martin Gingerich, "Dylan Thomas and the Ark of the Covenant," Anglo-Welsh Review, 19 (Spring, 1971), p. 183; A. T. Davies, p. 72.

[44]Frye, "The Romantic Myth," p. 32; Frye, Romanticism Reconsidered, pp. 2-3.

[45]No one has explained the exact meaning of the phrase "cities of nine / Days' night." Emery calls it a "passage of extensive implication" and labels "nine / Days' night" as "that mysterious reference" (WDT 133). Tindall believes that the cities are London and New York, "where Thomas was a nine-day wonder," with overtones of Sodom and Gomorrah (RG 22). Still, the significance of "nine" and of the phrase as a whole remains undisclosed. We know from Thomas's letters that he was greatly influenced by Blake. He said in 1933, "I am in the path of Blake, but so far behind him that only the wings of his heels are in sight" (SL 23). He always mentions Blake in any list of favorite poets or poets who influenced him the most . It is likely that in writing a prophetic, apocalyptic poem such as "Author's Prologue" Thomas was recalling Blake when he wrote the phrase "cities of nine / Days' night." One of Blake's greatest poems is Vala, or The Four Zoas. The central drama of this poem is the struggle among the Four Zoas or symbolic constituents of the Eternal Man or Cosmos. The poem is divided into the nine nights of judgment day (hence the "days / night" pun in Thomas) during which the Zoas strive to dominate one another but finally submit to their original harmonious integration in Albion or the Eternal Man. During the preceding eight nights of the poem, as in Thomas's poem, evil cities are destroyed. In Night the Ninth, the ninth and last section of the poem, two major actions occur. First, Los, the blacksmith artist, builds the New Jersusalem, the City of Art or Imagination, the agency for man's salvation. Second, there is the final harvest of souls, a spiritual fruition. Thomas, too, resembles a blacksmith artist in "Author's Prologue," where he must "hew and smite / A clash of anvils" to build his Art of Art. The cities in Thomas's poem must undergo the "nine / Days' night" of judgment day as do the cities in The Four Zoas.

Finally, in Thomas's poem as in Blake's, there is a final spiritual harvest when the seed-like arks cause the flood of destruction to flower: "My ark sings in the sun / At God speeded summer's end / And the flood flowers now." Writing a poem of similar intent and intensity, Thomas followed Blake in the use of the blacksmith-artist persona, the final spiritual harvest as the culmination of apocalypse, and, most clearly, in the hitherto unexplained reference to the nine-night structure of Blake's epic poem.

APPENDIX

INDEX OF EXPLICATIONS

The Poems of 1934-36:

The Poems of 1936-45:

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